

Denise Tepler
Topsham
LD 1215

Honorable Denise Tepler
13 Homeplace
Topsham, ME 04086
(207)729-4018

April 25, 2023

Health and Human Services Committee
Cross Building, Room 209

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

I write today in strong support of L.D. 1215, An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products. I will not reiterate the statistics and data that make clear how important eliminating flavored tobacco products is to the health and well-being of our youth — I know many others will be sharing this with you.

Instead, I will share my story of teenage addiction to nicotine and how tough it is to stop even as you get older and wiser. Born in 1956, I grew up in the 1960s when tobacco advertising was everywhere and while we kind of knew it wasn't good for you, there were few restrictions. My parents were both smokers, my dad enjoyed pipes, cigars, and unfiltered Pall Mall cigarettes. My mother smoked Kents. The brands were important because they were targeted by the industry to certain audiences. My dad went for the tough, masculine brand and my mom for the clean, all white (feminine) look of her cigarettes. I was often sent to the gas station a 10 minute walk away, with a quarter, to buy Mom a new pack.

I first tried a cigarette (I think stolen from Mom's purse) on my walk to middle school at 14. I was fully hooked by 15. My high school permitted students to smoke on the grounds outdoors during free time. My lunch was often a lemonade, a chocolate chip cookie, and a cigarette — all consumed outdoors on a heated vent regardless of the weather. My brand was Parliment — another all white cigarette advertised to women. It had a recessed filter, which seemed cleaner and somehow "healthier."

I smoked all through college and graduate school and by the time I was married at 25, I regularly consumed more than a pack a day. At 26, living and working in Little Rock, Arkansas, I began to develop a morning cough. That scared me. And I was very, very fortunate that the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, my employer, had a smoking cessation program, run by a charismatic man who understood addiction. Giving up smoking regularly was one of the hardest things I have ever done. It required sleeping medication and I gained about 20 lbs. Suddenly waiting (for anything — restaurant seating, a bus, to enter an event) became almost impossible. A glass of wine or a cup of coffee was a trigger. My quitting journey continued for almost 10 years as I occasionally gave in the cigarette urge over that time. I have not had a single cigarette now for more than 25 years, but still occasionally feel the pull of that addiction.

All of this is shared to help illustrate how the tobacco/e-cigarette industry targets certain demographics and how effective that targeting is. And once they've got you, you are hooked for a good long time. Nicotine addiction is very hard to beat.

My youngest daughter is a science teacher at Lewiston Middle School. She tells me that many of her students vape nicotine products regularly. They are hooked by an industry that makes e-cigs look "cool" and makes flavors that not only make them attractive to kids but make the products seem innocent — like candy. In addition, vape pods clearly hold much more nicotine than traditional tobacco products. My daughter tells me, no, it is not "Reefer Madness" to see these products as changing behavior and increasing anxiety in middle schoolers — it is very real.

Nicotine is a horribly addictive substance, let's end the targeting of children as a

market for these products.

Thank you for all your work in the HHS Committee.