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LD 1215

LD 1215 An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Tara Young and I live in Ellsworth. I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1215, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products."

I work in public health to prevent teen substance use in my community, I'm also the mother of three teenage children. Part of my job includes nicotine treatment. I work with some adults, but mostly youth under 18 who smoke or vape. Of the many young people I've worked with who smoke or vape, all of them started with vaping and all of them started by using flavored vape products.

Flavored vape products are specifically targeted to children, even young children. Flavors like Sour Patch Kids and Apple Juice Box are more appealing to pre-teens than they are for anyone approaching adulthood.

I've worked with kids addicted to nicotine as young as 11 and 12 years old. That's students in 6th and 7th grade, and I have colleagues who have worked with kids in 5th grade.

I was also in the Army National Guard and served for a time as the Commander for the Medical Detachment. I tried to help one of my Soldiers who had begun vaping. He wanted to quit after it caused him to have trouble running. He was very fit before he started vaping. He had so much difficulty quitting that even when he was struggling to pass his physical requirements for guard membership he still couldn't quit. He started with Mango Strawberry flavor.

In 2021, 43% Maine youth tried an electronic vapor product by age 18. These products are very addictive, and the flavors are one of the main enticements to starting nicotine use. Nicotine use causes or exacerbates anxiety and depression, as well as causing and worsening physical health conditions.

The entire state of Maine will shoulder the increased health care and mental health care costs associated with a rise in youth vaping, but we can and should do something -now- to help prevent any more youth from getting hooked. Adult convenience should not be considered an equivalent concern; if adults are already dependent on nicotine use, they can easily switch to using other, non-flavored products. This bill does not eliminate the sale of all tobacco products, just the ones that are designed to be the most appealing to youth. This should not be a difficult decision.

Eliminating flavored tobacco and vape products will save the state money and improve the physical and mental health of our children, who will then go on to become healthier, more resilient, and more productive adults. Please vote in favor of LD 1215, An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products. Thank you very much for your time.