

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Nicole Clegg and I serve as the Acting CEO at Planned Parenthood of Northern New England and I am pleased to submit testimony in support of LD 1215.

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England provides comprehensive reproductive and sexual health care to more than 14,000 people in Maine at four health centers located in Biddeford, Portland, Sanford and Topsham. People turn to us for affordable, high-quality care including wellness exams, birth control, disease testing and treatment, cancer screenings, abortion care as well as a variety of primary care services. We see everyone who comes to us regardless of ability to pay, and in a typical year, we provide approximately \$3-3.5 million in free and discounted care to our communities in Maine each year.

As an organization providing reproductive health care, many of our patients are younger, are part of the LGBTQ+ community, and are less likely to have a relationship with a primary care provider. Our patients are more likely to disclose issues like substance use, mental health concerns, or intimate partner violence in a health center like Planned Parenthood than in other settings. It is from this perspective that I submit this testimony.

The truth is that tobacco does not taste good, smoking— at least for beginners can be a harsh, irritating, experience. Why then, do people smoke? The answer in a word— nicotine. Recent studies have shown that nicotine literally rewires how the brain processes dopamine, over time shifting an initial neurological reaction of aversion *and* reward to one overwhelmingly of reward<sup>1</sup>.

Throughout its history the Tobacco Industry has designed its products and the marketing for them in order to expand market share and attract new customers in large part to overcome this initial reaction of revulsion. These efforts, be they through marketing— often targeted at disadvantaged populations such as women and people of color— or through adjusting the products themselves via things like manipulating nicotine levels and taste are all designed with a singular purpose— to create new customers with an addictive craving that their products can fulfill.

The explosion in flavored tobacco products in recent years is a particularly insidious example of these efforts with flavors and marketing clearly designed to appeal to younger people. By masking the harshness and soothing the irritation caused by tobacco smoke, flavors like cherry crush, vivid vanilla or banana cream (actual flavored tobacco flavors), make it easier for beginners – primarily youth – to experiment with tobacco and ultimately become addicted. In short, flavors hook kids. This is intentional. The tobacco companies know that 95% of adult

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<sup>1</sup>Taryn E. Grieder, Morgane Besson, Geith Maal-Bared and Derek van der Kooy. “β2\* nAChRs on VTA dopamine and GABA neurons separately mediate nicotine aversion and reward”, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, November 27, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1908724116>

smokers start by age 21. The flavored products aren't for adults – tobacco companies are purposefully designing and marketing products to our children to get them addicted to nicotine.

The awful truth is that these efforts are working, four out of five youth who have ever used tobacco products started with a flavored product and tobacco use among Maine youth has been skyrocketing – nearly 1 in 3 Maine middle and high schoolers now uses some form of tobacco product, including cigarettes, cigars, e-cigarettes and chewing tobacco.

While laying out the myriad negative effects of tobacco use are far beyond the scope of this testimony, it should be noted that the impacts of prolonged tobacco use on Reproductive Health alone are numerous and profound including a reduction in fertility, negative impacts on hormone production, damaging the DNA of sperm and the potential for increased incidence of ectopic pregnancy. If one does become pregnant while smoking the impacts can be even more severe– smoking during pregnancy has a demonstrated linkage to pregnancy complications up to and including miscarriage and death as well as significant impacts on fetal health leading to low birth weight, retardation of lung development, birth defects such as cleft lip and/or cleft palate and an increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)<sup>2</sup>.

LD 1215 is an important public health measure that will help our state protect children and other vulnerable populations from an industry which seeks to rob them of their health. By targeting both flavored tobacco products and the marketing behind them, this bill will help our state be healthier. It is for these reasons I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1215.

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<sup>2</sup> FDA, "How Smoking Affects Reproductive Health", <https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/health-effects-tobacco-use/how-smoking-affects-reproductive-health>