

LD 1215: An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products
Testimony of Kevin Lewis, President and CEO, Community Health Options
April 25, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Kevin Lewis, I'm the President and CEO of Community Health Options and a partner of the Tobacco-Free Maine Works coalition. I'm testifying in favor of LD 1215, an Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

As Maine's only nonprofit CO-OP health insurance company, we exist for the benefit of our Members. Our mission is to provide affordable, high-quality benefits that promote health and wellbeing. We provide comprehensive health insurance benefits to individuals, families, and businesses. We insure over a thousand businesses across Maine.

Given our goal to promote health and wellbeing of our members and among Maine communities, our benefits include a focus on the reduction of tobacco use, a leading cause of preventable death and disease in Maine. However, there's also a business case for supporting these efforts. As a health insurer, we see businesses paying higher health care costs due to tobacco use among employees, which can put unnecessary strain on their bottom-lines. Altogether, smoking costs Maine \$811 million annually in associated health care expenses [1].

The best way to reduce tobacco use is to make sure kids never pick up the products in the first place because most tobacco users start young. One in five Maine high school students are currently using a tobacco product [2], and young people often cite appealing flavors as a primary reason for using the products [3].

It's critical that Maine's lawmakers end the sale of all flavored tobacco products, including flavored e-cigarettes, flavored cigars, and menthol cigarettes in order to reduce the burden of tobacco-related disease on Maine's communities and businesses.

I urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 1215.

Sources:

[1] Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Smoking in Maine",

<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/population-health/data/documents/Smoking-Infographic-030117.pdf>

[2] Maine Department of Health & Human Services & Maine Department of Education, "Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey", 2021. <https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/2021-results>.

[3] Ambrose BK, et al., "Flavored Tobacco Product Use Among US Youth Aged 12-17 Years, 2013-2014," Journal of the American Medical Association, October 26, 2015.