



April 22, 2023

Dear Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Neil Korsen. I am a resident of West Bath, family physician, and chair of the Maine Lung Cancer Coalition (MLCC), a statewide grant-funded lung cancer prevention and screening program. I am writing to express our strong support for the proposed legislation, LD 1215, to end the sale of flavored tobacco products in Maine. Thank you for considering our comments.

The MLCC is a multidisciplinary, cross organizational effort to: 1) Engage and educate the public, patients, health care providers, health care payers, and policymakers about evidence-based lung cancer prevention and screening practices; and 2) Develop, implement, and evaluate innovative programs to increase access to evidence-based lung cancer prevention, screening, and treatment services to the entire Maine population, including residents of rural underserved areas.

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer mortality in the United States, leading to more than 150,000 deaths per year. In Maine, our lung cancer rates are 30% higher than the national average. There are disparities in the incidence and treatment of lung cancer: Maine men have a 30% higher lung cancer rate than Maine women; and 75% of lung cancer cases in Maine are detected late and are often not treated. While lung cancer has many causes, **research shows that tobacco use is the most important risk factor for lung cancer: 80-90% of lung cancer deaths in the U.S. are caused by tobacco use. The impact extends to people who don't smoke as well: research shows that people who don't smoke but live with someone who does have a 20-30% increased risk of lung cancer due to secondhand smoke, compared to someone who doesn't smoke and doesn't have that exposure.**

Through its work, the MLCC raises the profiles of lung cancer risk factors, as well as evidence-based policy solutions and health care system changes to reduce lung cancer incidence and mortality. We know that tobacco addiction is a pediatric epidemic. If youth don't start using tobacco before the age of 21, they are unlikely to ever do so. We also know the tobacco industry is laser-focused on youth and young adults, even calling them their "replacement smokers". Tobacco companies have developed an array of candy and fruit-flavored products in colorful packaging to attract youth and mask the harsh taste of tobacco. Menthol is the most dangerous flavor of all because it makes it easier to start smoking and harder to quit.

Preventing youth tobacco use is essential for reducing the burden of lung cancer in Maine. Please support the proposed ordinance to end the sale of flavored tobacco products. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Neil Korsen, MD, MSc
Chair, Maine Lung Cancer Coalition