

LD 1215: “An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products,” sponsored by Senator Jill Duson (D-Cumberland)

Dear Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services,

I am writing as a family physician practicing in Portland, Maine to testify in support of LD 1215: “An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.” As a family physician, I take care of people of all ages and from all backgrounds. I have taken care of dozens of patients with lung cancer, some in remission, and some dying of the disease. Many of these patients share a commonality, they started smoking young – and by young, I don’t mean in college. I mean between 10-12 years old, and now, I am managing their aftereffects decades later. Cancer is obviously what most people think of as a serious complication from smoking, but I see many more: Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), immunosuppression from smoking, chronic respiratory illnesses, the list goes on. While I can intervene on those conditions, the damage is often already permanent.

We need to prevent people from getting to this stage. An important way to do this is to stop those early years of smoking: 95% of adult tobacco smokers start before the age of 21, according to the Substance Use and Mental Health Services Administration. That is why I support LD 1215. Think of all the smokers you know or see outside; more than 9 in 10 started when they were younger than 21 years old. Too many children nowadays are vaping or smoking, which far too often will turn into a lifetime of tobacco use. Flavored tobacco products are precisely targeted to kids, working to get them smoking early. In fact, four out of five children that have used tobacco in Maine started with flavored tobacco products. The evidence is clear – we need to ban flavored tobacco products to decrease youth smoking. Massachusetts enacted a flavored tobacco product ban in the past decade; research in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* showed there was an almost immediate decrease in use of flavored and non-flavored tobacco in the 6 months following the ban. Four of our fellow northeastern states (Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Rhode Island) have all banned flavored e-cigarettes. When will Maine do the same?

In medical school, I never thought I’d be asking middle school students if they’re smoking, but now it’s a routine question I ask in their checkups. The medical importance of decreasing youth smoking cannot be understated, and that is why LD 1215 is a good policy that should be supported and enacted.

Thank you,
Brendan Prast, MD
Portland, Maine