



Testimony Allyson Perron Drag, Government Relations Director, Senior Regional Lead
American Heart Association

In Support of LD 2028 “An Act to Amend Certain State Tax Laws”

Chairs Grohoski, Perry and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony. The American Heart Association is the nation’s oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke, whose mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. I am testifying in support of LD2028, particularly Section B-5 which more closely aligns the definition of tobacco products with that in Title 22 Section 1551.

In 2019, this Committee and the Maine Legislature passed LD 1028 “An Act to Prevent and Reduce Tobacco Use with Adequate Funding and by Equalizing the Taxes on Tobacco Products and To Improve Public Health” which equalized taxes on all tobacco products to the rate of combustible cigarettes. During the debate in 2019 the focus was on the need to increase the rate on other tobacco products (OTP) which were much lower than the rate for cigarettes and the fact that the tobacco industry uses the tax loopholes for OTPs to develop new products and opportunities to ensure that youth and adults continue to use and become addicted to nicotine and their products. LD 2028 attempts to align the policy debated and adopted previously by the legislature and signed into law in 2019 to address youth nicotine addiction by taxing all products at the rate equivalent to combustible cigarettes.

The tobacco industry continues to introduce new products, with high levels of nicotine and significant appeal to kids to ensure that there continues to be a next generation addicted to nicotine. The industry is spending millions of dollars marketing new smokeless products as less harmful, more convenient, and more socially acceptable alternatives to traditional cigarettes. Due to their price sensitivity and strong receptivity to industry marketing practices, youth are especially susceptible to these industry tactics. We are seeing new products come onto the market that are synthetic nicotine pouches such as Zyn, Velo and Rogue which are popular with high school students.

Synthetic nicotine products are being pushed on our kids as risk-free and trendy, safe alternatives. The 2023 Maine Integrated Health Survey showed that 3.1% of Maine High School students currently use chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, snus, or dissolvable tobacco productsⁱ – twice the rate of national respondents using nicotine pouches (1.5%)ⁱⁱ. Without regulation aligning taxation and sales policies we risk seeing these products becoming the next heavily used products that electronic cigarettes were just a few short years ago.

We must do all that we can to ensure that our current middle- and high-school students are the first nicotine free generation. The American Heart Association believes that the measure before you both meets the intent of the previous legislature and will reduce youth tobacco use. We urge your swift adoption of LD 2028.

Sincerely
Allyson Perron Drag
American Heart Association/ Stroke Association
Government Relations Director, Senior Regional Lead

ⁱhttps://www.maine.gov/miyhs/sites/default/files/2023_Reports/Detailed_Reports/HS/MIYHS2023_Detailed_Reports_HS_Stat%20e/Maine%20High%20School%20Detailed%20Tables.pdf

ⁱⁱ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7244a1.htm?s_cid=mm7244a1_w