

Testimony in Support of LD 210

Marin Johnson

Scarborough

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*Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation:*

My name is Marin Johnson, and I live in Scarborough Maine. I have been in the healthcare and public health field for over 15 years, with a focus on preventive health and nutrition.

Growing up in the 1990's smoking was ubiquitous. I breathed in secondhand smoke at my best friend's house, where I spent countless hours. Tons of kids in my junior high and high school smoked, and avoiding the peer pressure to join them was tough.

While we've seen major gains in reducing smoking over the years, I'm still amazed at how many people, especially adolescents, check 'yes' to tobacco use among the patients I work with. I remember I used to hover my pen over the 'no' box thinking it was a no brainer that people don't smoke anymore. But the 'yes' box is checked way too often, and when I see kids, even kid athletes, smoking, vaping and engaging in these behaviors it's really concerning. Nearly 1 in 5 Maine high schoolers currently use a tobacco product, a rate that's well above the national average. [1] Research shows that increasing the price of tobacco products makes it harder for young people to access them.

I support the tobacco tax increase that's included in LD210 because states and communities that have passed similar policies have seen positive results in reducing youth tobacco use. Even tobacco companies have acknowledged that tobacco taxes help reduce youth smoking. In addition, the last time we raised taxes on tobacco, we saw a significant decline in youth smoking rates. We need to break the cycle of addiction that we see far too often in schools, community settings and homes.

I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on the tobacco tax increase included in LD 210 to keep our kids healthy, avoid addictive behaviors and prevent the health risks tobacco poses to our communities. We must invest in our state's future by keeping Maine's kids healthy.

Sincerely,

Marin Johnson, MS

Sources:

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