

LD 210
Ellen Thorne, Rumford ME
February 1, 2025

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 Ellen Thorne, I live in Rumford and I am a public health professional with over a decade of experience working with youth in our communities. I am testifying in support of the tobacco tax increase that is included in LD 210.

Maine's overall cancer rate is the highest in New England and Maine's tobacco tax is among the lowest in the region. According to the 2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, nearly 1 in 5 Maine high school students currently use a tobacco product. This is when addiction takes hold, 87% of daily smokers had tried their first cigarette by the time they were 18 years old and 95% had by the time they were 21.¹

The Surgeon General has called raising prices on cigarettes "one of the most effective tobacco control interventions."² Tobacco tax increases help make cigarettes too expensive for price-sensitive kids to buy and help encourage smokers to quit. For example, after Oklahoma's \$1.00 per pack cigarette tax increase went into effect on July 1, 2018, its Tobacco Helpline saw an 85 percent increase in registrations in the first month compared to the same period the year before.³

An additional benefit of an increased tobacco tax is an increase in revenue, every state that has increased their tobacco tax by a significant amount has enjoyed a substantial increase in revenue.⁴ In addition to raising the tobacco tax we should also guarantee that a portion of the proceeds are allocated to help current tobacco users quit, specifically, into the Fund for Healthy Maine.

Tobacco companies are targeting our youth hoping to establish a new generation of lifelong tobacco users. We can protect our Maine youth by making tobacco products less accessible and increasing the tobacco tax has been proven to do just that.

I respectfully urge you to vote Ought to Pass on the tobacco tax increase included in LD 210.

Sincerely,
Ellen Thorne

Sources

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2014. Analysis by the American Lung Association Epidemiology and Statistics Unit Using SPSS Software.
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), The Health Consequences of Smoking: 50 Years of Progress. A Report of the Surgeon General, Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK179276/pdf/Bookshelf_NBK179276.pdf
3. Collins, E, "Tobacco tax hike has more Oklahoma smokers trying to quit," KOKH, August 9, 2018,
4. <https://ktul.com/news/local/tobaccotax-hike-has-more-oklahomans-trying-to-quit>. 9 CTFK, Raising State Cigarette Taxes Always Increases State Revenues (and Always Reduces Smoking), <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0098.pdf>.