

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

My name is Dr. Anne Coates. I'm a pediatric pulmonologist and the Vice President of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (Maine AAP). I'm submitting this letter in support of Language Part "E" of LD 210. Part "E" provides crucial funding to raise the Maine tobacco excise tax from \$2.00 per pack of cigarettes to \$3.00 per pack of cigarettes, with an equivalent percentage increase for other tobacco products.

I'd like to take this opportunity to express how thrilled I am that Governor Janet Mills included this funding in her biennial budget, and how crucial it is that Maine is considering raising the tobacco excise tax for the first time since 2005. It is long overdue, and I am appreciative that Governor Mills recognizes the importance of preventing youth tobacco use and addiction.

I care for children from across the state with serious health conditions and have witnessed so many impacted by the harmful effects of tobacco and nicotine. From infants being born prematurely and developing respiratory distress syndrome, a serious lung condition, after exposure to tobacco in utero, to toddlers with asthma requiring multiple hospitalizations due in part to tobacco exposure in their homes and vehicles. When I counsel their family members to quit smoking, all too often I hear, "I want to but I can't do it, Dr. Coates. I've been smoking since I was 11." To the teenagers in my clinic, who present with abnormal lung function, scarring on their chest x-rays and inability to keep up with their peers in gym class due to smoking cigarettes since middle school.

Youth tobacco use in our state is an emergency. Currently, one in five Maine high school students are using a tobacco product – a rate far above the national average. I would like to point out this isn't just a statistic. These are our children, and they are dealing with often crippling nicotine addictions that are harming their brains and bodies.

As a pediatrician, there's only so much I can do once the damage to their health has been done, and they're hooked on such a highly addictive substance. It's prevention measures, like this proposed tobacco tax increase, that will help to prevent kids from accessing tobacco products and becoming addicted in the first place. In fact, this increased tax is projected to decrease the percentage of youth under the age of 18 who are smoking by 7%, and would prevent 700 youth from becoming adults who smoke.

Imagine it: this tobacco tax will allow 700 children to live healthier lives free from nicotine addiction and tobacco-related disease, and those benefits will ripple out and affect many more Mainers for generations to come. When paired with the long-term health care cost savings of \$48.84 million, and the revenue that will be generated for the state, this tobacco tax increase is a no-brainer.

For the betterment of Maine's youth and future, I urge you to support the inclusion of Language Part "E" of LD 210. Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Anne Coates, MD, FAAP
Vice President, Maine Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics