

Nicole Hewes  
North Yarmouth  
LD 210

Dear 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 Nicole Hewes. I'm a resident of North Yarmouth and I support the tobacco tax increase included in LD 210. I spent a decade working in public education, five of those years with adolescents. Currently, I work in the public health data space.

I support the tobacco tax increase because I've watched former students become addicted to tobacco products. According to the 2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, nearly 1 in 5 Maine high school students currently use a tobacco product. As an educator, it was disturbing to witness young adolescents potentially set themselves up for a lifetime of addiction to tobacco through their early exposure to these products. Indeed, the US CDC reports that 9 out of 10 adults who smoke cigarettes daily first try smoking before age 18. Clearly, we should take action to do anything we can to prevent teens from trying tobacco products and exposing themselves to the well-documented negative health effects of using tobacco.

When Maine raised our tobacco tax twenty years ago, one result was significant declines in youth tobacco use. Given the historical efficacy of a tobacco tax increase on reducing teen tobacco use and the fact that Maine currently has one of the lowest tobacco taxes in the region, supporting the first increase to this tax in 20 years seems like a logical step to take to improve the health of young Mainers. Not only will such an increase benefit our young people, it can also encourage adult smokers to quit.

In addition to raising the tax, it is also important to ensure that a portion of the funding raised by the tax increase gets directed toward programs to help current tobacco users quit, specifically the Fund for a Healthy Maine. Providing more funding for these programs through the additional funds generated by the tobacco tax will also help to reduce the impact of tobacco use on the health of Maine's people.

Based on my experiences as an educator, I believe that the best way to break the cycle of tobacco addiction in Maine and to reduce the burden of tobacco-related cancers in our state is to focus on preventing young people from trying and becoming addicted to tobacco products. If we can prevent them from ever picking up a tobacco product, as this tobacco tax increase would help do, we'll set the next generation of Maine's kids off on the right foot to lead healthy lives, free from addiction.

I respectfully urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on the tobacco tax increase included in LD 210. Thank you for your time.