

Maine LD 210 Hearing Testimony (Cigarettes and Tobacco Tax Increase)

2/3/25

Ben Brooks – Category Manager – Nouria Energy

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Ben Brooks, I am a resident of Hollis ME, and I am the Tobacco Category Manager for Nouria Energy. Nouria is a 36-year-old, family-owned company, based in Worcester MA. We operate 168 gas stations with convenience stores in New England, 37 of which are in Maine.

At Nouria it is our privilege to do business in ME. We strive to exceed our guests' expectations at all our stores. We serve fresh foods through our partnership with Amato's, fresh bean-to-cup coffee, healthy snack options, top-quality gasoline and so much more. While yes, tobacco is a part what we sell it is not what defines us as a retailer in the Maine communities we serve.

Nouria's opposition to this tax increase is not solely based on potential lost profits from tobacco sales, which will happen. Our opposition is also based on it being a fundamentally unfair and flawed tax increase. It targets and hurts low-income nicotine users much more than medium and high-income nicotine users. Low-income citizens of Maine CANNOT afford an additional tax on them. Especially with the recent news regarding tariffs that will drive prices even higher than they already are. These residents will be paying threefold, cost of goods increase due to tariffs, excise tax increases such as this, and on top of all of that will be the states sales tax on the higher overall product cost.

I can assure you, as I've seen many times during my 20-year career in the convenience store industry, when you disproportionately tax products compared to neighboring states you create black and grey markets for these products. I know these shoppers well; they will look elsewhere for the products they want at a cost they can afford. This leads to lost sales revenue for small businesses in ME, lost tax revenue for the state and most importantly a criminal street market that operates outside of the boundaries of federal, state and local laws.

I would also like to be on the record of opposing this bill personally. As a Maine resident I find it hypocritical that the state continues to target the nicotine industry and its users disproportionately compared to other unhealthy products. I have used nicotine products for over 20 years, moving from the most harmful product of cigarettes, to vape products and now tobacco free nicotine pouches. I and many other contributing members of society enjoy these products, are fully aware of the risks and do not want the government to target us in order to balance the state budget.

In closing, on behalf of myself and Nouria, I ask you to please consider all of the unintended consequences this could cause and vote no on the cigarette and tobacco tax increase.

Thank You

Ben Brooks

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