



Testimony of Liz Blackwell-Moore from Cumberland County Public Health Regarding:

LD 201: An Act Making Unified Appropriations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provision of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

February 24, 2025

Hello Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Taxation. My name is Liz Blackwell-Moore and I am the Director of the Cumberland County Public Health Department and I live in Portland, Maine.

While Cumberland County Public Health was only established three years ago, I have been working in Public Health in Maine for the past 25 years. My area of expertise is community health and prevention and public health infrastructure. I was a member of the Blue Ribbon Commission to Design a Plan for Sustained Investment in Prevention Disease and Improving the Health of Maine Communities, and I am a current member of the Maine Recovery Council.

I am testifying today to applaud the Governor's Budget Proposal for continuing to fund public health and to urge you to keep the Fund for a Healthy Maine intact by moving tobacco excise tax revenue into FHM rather than moving programs and positions out. With all the threats to public health we are facing and likely to face in the years ahead, we need public health and prevention programs in a secure location. We shouldn't be shrinking and weakening the FHM for no reason.

During my career, I have seen many changes to the public health infrastructure and public health funding. There are two really important lessons that I've learned that I would like to share with you as you consider this biennial budget and how to fund public health infrastructure and prevention programming:

1. **While sometimes invisible, prevention does works.** Prevention efforts often happen quietly across a whole community and take time to see the impact - more than 2-year budget cycles. Research consistently shows that when communities invest in prevention efforts, health outcomes improve. We can look to our own prevention programming to see success. Maine has invested in the prevention of tobacco and substance use for the past 20 years and we have seen significant reductions in tobacco and substance use among young people: In 2009, 18% of high school students in Maine regularly smoked cigarettes compared to 6% in 2023. That's a 66% reduction in cigarette use. In that same time period there has been a 35% reduction in regular alcohol use, a 60% reduction in regular binge drinking, a 15% reduction in regular cannabis use and an almost 40% reduction in regular use of prescriptions drug not prescribed by a doctor among high school students in Maine.ⁱ

Prevention takes time, but with consistent effort and processes that use the science of prevention, it does work!

2. **Consistent public health funding is the best way to ensure effectiveness of prevention efforts and positive health outcomes.** With consistent funding, public health organizations like Cumberland County Public Health are able to maintain trained and qualified staff, build deep relationships with the communities we serve, spend time understanding the needs and strengths of communities, and use evidenced based strategies most likely to meet those needs and strengths. But the public health needs of communities are even greater than our current capacity. With consistent foundational funding and a stable public health infrastructure, our organization can expand our capacity with other funding streams, including opioid settlement dollars, to meet additional public health challenges identified by our communities.

Without foundational public health funding, our current and expanded efforts to meet the health needs of our communities are at serious risk.

I brought these lessons to my work on the Blue Ribbon Commission. The Commission unanimously recommended that excise taxes from tobacco be moved into FHM so the fund can be used as it was intended, public health can have consistent stable funding and Maine can continue to invest in prevention. I urge you to adopt the Blue Ribbons Commissions recommendation and take the simple, no-cost step of keeping FHM intact. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ⁱ Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey Data 2009 and 2023

- In 2009, 32% of high school students in Maine regularly drank alcohol compared to 21% in 2023.
- In 2009, 20% of high school students in Maine regularly binged drank compared to 8% in 2023.
- In 2009, 22% of high school students in Maine regularly used cannabis compared to 19% in 2023
- And in 2009, 8% of high school students in Maine regularly used a prescription drug not prescribed by a doctor compared to 5% in 2023.