



Testimony in support of LD 1658

Presented by Liz Blackwell-Moore, Director of Cumberland County Public Health

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Chair, distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Liz Blackwell-Moore, and I am the Director of Cumberland County Public Health. I'm here to speak in strong support of LD 1658, *An Act to Preserve and Strengthen the Fund for a Healthy Maine*.

At its core, LD 1658 is a prevention bill. It aligns our policies and our funding with what we know works in public health: stable funding, strategic investment, and upstream action that keeps people healthy long before they show up in emergency rooms, clinics, or treatment programs.

The Fund for a Healthy Maine was created with that exact vision in mind. Using tobacco settlement dollars to prevent disease, reduce tobacco use, support children and families, and strengthen community health was one of Maine's greatest public health achievements. But over time, as demands have grown and revenue streams have shifted, FHM is at risk which means prevention and public health are at risk of being under or unfunded.

LD 1658 restores that original promise by ensuring the Fund for a Healthy Maine has the resources in place each year to make baseline investments in public health and prevention. This is not an abstract calculation—it reflects the actual scale of prevention work that Maine communities require: tobacco cessation programs, early childhood supports, substance use prevention, preventative oral healthcare, chronic disease programming, and school- and community-based initiatives that reach people where they live, work, and learn. It also accounts for the current reality which is that we can't count on federal funding to meet the public health and prevention needs that we have in Maine.

I have spent the last 25 years working in public health, much of that time in substance use prevention. Over the past 7 or 8 years, I have seen a dramatic increase in the number of people in the community who talk about the importance of prevention. Even when the topic is treatment or recovery, the conversation ends up on prevention and how we must do more of it. There is some amazing prevention work happening, but it must continue to be funded!

This bill recognizes that prevention is not a cost—it is an investment. The US CDC estimates that for every dollar spent on comprehensive tobacco control programs, states get a \$55 return on investment, mostly in averted health care costs to treat smoking-related illness. For every young person who doesn't use substances at an early age, for every adult who gets support to quit smoking, for every family who has access to resources that reduce future chronic disease, Maine becomes a healthier, stronger, and more financially stable state.

As a public health professional, I can tell you with certainty: we cannot build a healthy future on unstable or insufficient funding. LD 1658 gives Maine the tools to sustain prevention, support communities, and reduce the burden of disease for generations to come.

I urge you to support LD 1658 and help preserve and strengthen the Fund for a Healthy Maine. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to the health of our state.