

## Testimony in Support of LD 1772 and LD 1658

Senator Inwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is April Hughes, and I am a Program Manager at Healthy Communities of the Capital Area, a public health primary prevention organization based in Hallowell. I am writing to testify in support of LD 1772 and LD 1658, legislation that will strengthen and solidify Maine's public health prevention infrastructure.

For nearly 30 years, Maine has made a powerful and thoughtful choice to invest Master Tobacco Settlement dollars through the Fund for a Healthy Maine in prevention. That investment has paid off in ways that are both measurable and deeply human. Because of the Fund for a Healthy Maine, fewer Mainers are exposed to secondhand smoke in public places. Fewer middle and high school students are initiating tobacco use. Communities across the state have been supported to come together, such as parents, educators, youth, health professionals, and local leaders, to address tobacco and substance use before it leads to adverse health outcomes.

I have seen these impacts firsthand through my work at the community level. I have worked alongside young people as they developed and delivered prevention messages to their peers, helping shift social norms. I have seen families and community members come together through programs like StoryWalks, mattering events, and other community-based initiatives that strengthen relationships and foster connection, which are key protective factors against risky health behaviors. FHM dollars create spaces where youth feel that they matter, where they are trusted as leaders, supported as changemakers, and more deeply connected to their communities.

These investments do more than prevent tobacco use. They build belonging. They foster resilience. They strengthen relationships between youth, families, schools, organizations, and entire communities. That sense of mattering and connection is one of the strongest protective factors we have against substance use, poor mental health, and social isolation.

I want to be very clear- if the Fund for a Healthy Maine disappears, these impacts disappear too. We will not just lose programs, we will lose momentum. We will lose trusted community infrastructure. We will lose years of progress that cannot be easily rebuilt. We will lose opportunities to intervene early, before health care costs skyrocket and preventable harm occurs. And we will lose our ability to respond effectively to emerging threats such as vaping, increased binge drinking, and chronic disease drivers like poor nutrition, physical inactivity, and social isolation. While Maine has made meaningful progress in reducing cigarette use and addressing opioid addiction, this work is far from finished. Prevention is not a one-time success; it requires stability, consistency, and long-term commitment.

For these reasons, LD 1772 and LD 1658 will help protect and strengthen Maine's public health prevention efforts. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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