

To: Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services

From: Michelle Fong, Public Health Consultant & MPH student at the University of New England (anticipated graduation: February, 2024)

Re: Testimony in support of LD 1215

Date: April 25, 2023

Distinguished Committee Members,

Thank you for serving our great state and listening to me today. My name is Michelle Fong and I am a public health professional and a parent living in Hope, Maine. I am here in support of LD 1215.

I grew up in Maine when many people around me smoked as the dangers of tobacco use were coming to light. Their cost was laid bare to me as I witnessed my grandmother's demise from lung cancer and the toll it took on my father. Her two sisters also succumbed to lung cancer. They were all hooked as teens and were never able to recover from their addiction to nicotine. Over my lifetime, I have observed the decline of combustible smoking and the rise of big tobacco's next-generation marketing techniques – smokeless delivery and flavors.

Even without flavored tobacco products, Maine has a tobacco problem, and we pay dearly for it. Youth tobacco use rates are significantly higher than the nation's, leading to higher in-state rates of nicotine addiction and higher risk for all the negative health and economic outcomes associated with tobacco use. My two children, who are intelligent and capable young adults, nevertheless succumbed to e-cigarette use as teens. Regardless of the wisdom and boundaries laid down by responsible parents, tremendous social pressure plus cleverly disguised nicotine delivery devices strongly influence kids. Flavors amplify that influence. **We don't need to give people, especially kids, more reasons to get hooked on tobacco products; we need to give them less.**

Naming and packaging nicotine products like candy and ice cream, and making them smell and taste like treats when they are harmful and addictive is irresponsible and unethical. How could you support it? Big tobacco's marketing tactics that target youth, especially marginalized ones, are despicable and undermine parents' efforts and hopes for their children. **As leaders in our state, you are entrusted with stewardship and creating the conditions that help families thrive.**

Nicotine addiction is a risk factor for further substance use and addiction. Addicted youth who become addicted adults have a reduced capacity to care for themselves and contribute to their communities. Is that your vision of Maine thriving? **Your committee vote bears consequences now, and in the years to come.** The decision about whether to support LD 1215 is one of concern and conscience. I urge you to **protect Maine's future by ending the sale of flavored tobacco products through your support of LD 1215.** Thank you.