

Testimony of Ed Miller In Support of LD 1215 An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

April 25, 2023

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Ed Miller. I am a resident of Hallowell and a retired public health professional who spent nearly 30 years as the CEO of the American Lung Association in Maine after more than a decade at the Maine CDC. I have been involved in tobacco policy in this state since 1977.

I am also the past chair of Maine CDC's Tobacco Prevention and Control Advisory Council. This 9-member volunteer group was established in statute to provide guidance to the state's tobacco prevention program. Recently you received our annual report as required by law. One of our six recommendations is to ban the sale of flavored tobacco products.

Today, as a private citizen, I am urging you to unanimously pass LD 1215.

In the early 1980s Surgeon General C Everett Koop forcefully spoke out about the continuing tactics of the tobacco industry to addict children to nicotine. He called for stepped up prevention efforts and put forth the vision of a "Smoke free Class of the Year 2000" as an attainable goal. This effort resulted in the tobacco industry taking unprecedented efforts to maintain and expand their market. In one of their most disgusting campaigns, they brought back the 1930s cartoon character Joe Camel to champion their advertising.

The results were tragic. What had been a steady decline in youth smoking rapidly reversed into an epidemic rise. Unfortunately, Maine was a leader in this youth smoking explosion and tragically had the highest young adult smoking rate in the nation by the mid-1990s. But the Maine Legislature and Executive Branch stepped forward and committed to policies and programs that over the course of the next decade resulted in a 60% decline in youth smoking. It was significant enough to earn Maine national recognition.

Unfortunately, the tobacco industry is relentless in pursuing new young customers. The vast expansion of flavored tobacco products in all forms is undermining decades of public health progress. This is not an activity that has happened randomly or just in the past few years. Like in the past, the industry and its allies have set their sights on addicting a new generation. The shocking statistics speak for themselves.

The question before you today is whether the Legislature and Governor will once again step up to the challenge of reducing youth nicotine addiction. I urge you to do so by supporting LD 1215.

Thank you.