

In favor of LD 1215, An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco

Kristy Surles

Calais

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: Julie Daigle is speaking on me and my family's behalf today. My name is Kristy Surles, and I live in Calais, Maine. I am here in favor of LD 1215, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

I am the mother of two daughters ages 11 and 17 and I am also a healthcare professional. For the past two years my 17-year old daughter has been caught by us as well as her school numerous times using flavored tobacco. My teenager knows all of the risks that come along with choosing this behavior because we talk about them with her. I have shown her different scenarios in which patients' lungs have been affected by this, but still she chooses to continue. In making these decisions she is also choosing to not be honest with us and to accept any consequence that comes with getting caught.

I've heard people talk about how kids' vaping is due to "bad parenting." Let me tell you, we have tried all of the punishments out there and when we met with the school recently to see what could be done, we were alarmed at the number of students that have already been caught and suspended just this year because of vaping. The number was somewhere in the ballpark of 60 students, and the most alarming thing was that many of these students were between grades 5-8. It's hard to know where the kids are getting the products from. When I ask my own child, she is unwilling to share and just says that it is very easy to get. She has also shared with me, along with members of the school, that kids feel that they have to vape to fit in. It is viewed as a "cool" thing to do and there seems to be a lot of peer pressure to start doing it.

Unfortunately, once they have started it, in our experience, it is very difficult to stop. This has been completely devastating to us: never in a million years did I think that my daughter, who is very smart academically and who also has a very strong work ethic after school, would choose to do this. I am also completely upset to learn about all of her friends and classmates who are doing this, and I am very scared to know that many of the younger children in this community are starting such an addicting behavior at such a young age only because they see others that they look up to engaging in this everywhere they go.

While my daughter tells us she has quit vaping now, it unfortunately has been due to my husband being diagnosed recently with lip cancer from smoking- he started a young age too. He's had a successful surgery, thankfully, but we will be waiting to see whether it comes back over the next two years, a vulnerable time period for people with his type of cancer.

We need the support of all of you in the legislature to help keep young people from starting to use nicotine and from families being impacted the way that we have been. This has been so

stressful for us. This whole cycle starts with kids using nicotine, and for this generation, it's about the flavored tobacco products.

Please vote yes on LD 1215, An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco. This is very important!
Thank you.