

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Mary Lou Warn, I live in Winslow with my husband and 2 children, Carly a sophomore in college, and Jake a recent college graduate and in the workforce. I am testifying today in support of LD 1215 to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products.

I started advocating 6 years ago with ACS CAN when I realized my then 17-year-old son was vaping. I also joined forces with the Parents Against Vaping organization. I quickly learned how big tobacco companies targeted our youth with their relentless e-cigarette marketing campaigns and attractive flavors. Jake is the quintessential story of the success of an industry that preyed on him - they duped him into believing these were harmless products that were just flavored water vapor.

When Jake was in high school the e-cigarette scene exploded. I saw vape shops pop up all over town, the school bathrooms became known as vape rooms and students had trouble getting through the day without a nicotine fix. Jake has shared that he would hang out at the local vape shop trying the different flavors. No one was prepared to handle this. I noticed changes in my son, who was an excellent student athlete, NHS member, and the class VP. Jake tried to assure me he had done his research and had this under control, he could stop anytime, this was nothing like smoking cigarettes. When I asked him why he was doing it, he simply said "because it tastes good". At that time, there was no information available to counter the message the industry had led him and his friends to believe.

Jake went off to college to study business and play soccer. His dream. I made a surprise visit in the fall, where I found him in the cafeteria with a big group of friends. He was doing great! He said, "I'm figuring this out Mom".

Then everything fell apart. By spring I saw a dramatic change in my happy handsome son. I could hardly recognize him without his big smile. I had noticed he was often spending \$50 at Cumberland Farms near his campus, but still didn't get the connection. He was agitated, depressed, distracted and unhealthy. Both my husband and I made excuses. Then it hits us like a ton of bricks, he's vaping.

That was 3 years ago, he took himself out of that environment, transferred schools and moved home. Jake describes his addiction as a toxic artificial love. He will say he can still remember his favorite vape flavor, a Red Bull flavor called Energetic Bull. He can still taste it every time he thinks about it. If it didn't taste good, Jake never would have started.

He didn't touch a vape product for over a year and 1/2, and all it took was one occasion. Now it's a daily struggle, and when life gets stressful, addiction wins. Menthol is the flavor he has on hand; it can be purchased anywhere tobacco products are sold. It's part of who he is now. He hopes one day he will just stop, but deep down he knows it's not that easy.

My 80-year-old father says smoking is his biggest regret. He needs oxygen to help him get through the day. Both of my parents quit over 25 years ago but have long term health issues and my husband's father passed away at 52 from throat cancer. I never thought I had to worry about my kids using a tobacco product. I thought we had done a good job in protecting our kids, but instead we let our guard down and were blindsided by big tobacco looking for replacement smokers.

Recently I was invited to speak with a group of middle school students. I started by asking them what some of their favorite candy or ice cream flavors were. They enthusiastically participated, saying flavors like grape crush, oreo, wild berry, chocolate mint, and also started creating their own flavor combinations, vanilla cherry, orange raspberry, and smores. When they realized these are all e-cigarette flavors, they also realized these were flavors created to attract them. I was asked - why do these bad things exist? Why don't they just stop selling them?

The state has an important role in protecting public health, and that most definitely includes the health of our youth. We must keep our promise to our kids and protect them from these dangerous addictive products.