

Testimony of Everett Gillis
In favor of
LD 1215 An Act To End The Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Everett Gillis and I am a 21-year-old college student from Brunswick. I'm joining you today to speak in favor of LD 1215, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

In a way, I've been working to prevent tobacco use and nicotine addiction since I was a baby.

That probably surprises you. A baby, you are probably asking yourselves. It's true. I was in one of the very first television commercials promoting the relatively new Maine Tobacco HelpLine in 2002. Here's a photo of me, being held by my mom, as viewers are asked to think about their children's future.



Twenty years later, I'm here to ask Maine legislators almost the exact same question. What do you want for Maine kids? Should every one of us have the chance to be healthy and happy, learning and working in fields that we love? Will you stand up for us, even when it's hard, because it's the right thing to do?

I know for myself how hard it is for kids to resist tobacco. The tobacco companies sell us on a feeling and a culture of cool, with products that are so easy to try and then so hard to stop. If you are under any illusion that flavors aren't at the center of their strategy, think again.

I've watched too many friends have problems with their health, problems staying focused on their classes, problems staying in shape for their sports teams, problems losing friends, and even problems using the bathrooms at school. It's a mess, a tragedy of lost time and opportunity for so many young people. And most frustrating of all, it's completely preventable.

I'm one of the lucky ones – I managed to avoid flavored vapes (and to be clear, nobody is passing around unflavored vapes) when we all thought it was just a flavor, not filled with nicotine. And now I know the science behind how substances affect our minds and our bodies and create a pathway for addiction. Now I'm not just lucky, but vigilant in protecting my health.

Little did I know that my early career as a tobacco prevention model would come full circle to this moment. But here I am, and here you are, and I will now ask again, "what do you want for Maine kids?"

You might think voting 'yes' on LD 1215 is hard, but it is 100% the right thing to do.

Thank you, and if you want to watch the full commercial from 2002, take a photo of this QR code on your smart phone.

