



Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Mary Parham, I am Community Health Educator for MDI Hospital in Bar Harbor, and I am here today to testify on behalf of our Hospital Executive Team and Board Members in favor of LD 1215, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products. I would like to read out a statement from them to you this afternoon:

Mount Desert Island Hospital expresses support for the proposed ban of flavored tobacco sales in the State of Maine. Recently, MDI Hospital joined other healthcare organizations and professionals, businesses, nonprofit organizations, parents, teachers, students, and others to support a local flavored-tobacco ban. This measure passed in Bar Harbor, and we are happy to be able to support a similar initiative at the State level.

Following a review of relevant public health studies and support for this initiative from our healthcare providers, we believe that flavored tobacco products are targeted towards young people, with flavors that mimic fruit, candy, desserts, and drinks, designed to entice them into trying these products and subsequently becoming addicted to nicotine. As an addictive substance, nicotine poses a serious risk to the health and wellbeing of all individuals, but is particularly harmful to younger people, who are more susceptible to addiction. And studies show that the younger someone begins to use, the longer they will likely remain a user.

The 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey reported a dramatic increase in youth vaping, with 45% of Maine high school students reporting having used an e-cigarette at least once; use among middle schoolers was shown to be on the rise as well. In addition, the US CDC has linked the use of flavored e-cigarettes to an increased risk of addiction and long-term negative health effects, particularly for youths and young adults, stating that “Nicotine is highly addictive and can harm adolescent brain development, which continues into the early to mid-20s” The presence of these products in communities across Maine encourages our youth to experiment with them, putting their health and well-being at risk, and ultimately creating adults who are addicted, with compromised health and well-being as well, and with greater susceptibility to chronic diseases and premature mortality.

The tobacco industry has long been aware of the appeal of flavored tobacco to young people and has deliberately packed high concentrations of nicotine into their products to get them hooked. Therefore, MDI Hospital supports LD-1215 to ban the sale of flavored tobacco products to protect the health of our State’s young people.

As an organization dedicated to promoting community health, we urge the State of Maine to support LD-1215 as well. By doing so, we will be taking an important step towards protecting our youth and promoting a healthier future for all Maine residents.