

In favor of LD 1215, An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco
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Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Georgie Kendall and I live in Perry, in Washington County. I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1215, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

Like almost everyone who uses nicotine now or used to use it, I started smoking when I was just a teenager- this is back when we had a "butt hut" at school. I loved menthol the best because it tasted good and didn't smell as bad with my long thin cigarettes. The butt hut was this place where I went to hang out with my friends because I felt like a cool kid and I wanted to be accepted into a group of friends. Fear of not being accepted into social groups in middle and high school is real. I smoked for 10 years even with hospitalizations from asthma in my youth. I kept smoking even when I was out of breath as a young adult. Then I quit at the age of 26.

Now let's leap forward a few decades. I have visited many schools in Washington County, where I often I ask a blanket question: "Raise your hand if you have tried a vape." 80% of the students IN the classes with me raise their hands, starting in 8th grade. From talking to kids in schools over the last ten years as a public health professional, I can tell you that nicotine use, in the form of vaping, is still being used as a tool to be cool. These days, there's the "coolness" of the electronic vaping devices themselves, which are disguised as slick thumb drives and disposable single-use plastic tubes with really sweet, great-tasting and youthful sounding flavors, like tutti frutti or unicorn milk. These are marketed using the researched and effective tactics of targeted advertising and social media for youth, and using fun colors brighter than my jacket today to attract the attention of our youth. They sound and feel like food and candy. And there are so many flavors. Menthol is minty fresh, right? It is THE most dangerous flavor of them all. It makes you breathe more deeply to get that minty freshness IN, and it makes the nicotine even more addictive.¹

The advertising departments of tobacco companies spend 45 million dollars a year in Maine, 45 MILLION DOLLARS JUST IN MAINE specifically targeting poor, rural youth. Keep in mind that Washington County still has high levels of youth tobacco use initiation with cigarettes too- (youth cigarette use in 2021 was 12%, compared to a state rate of 7%²)- and menthol is being pushed on our kids through both vaping devices and cigarettes here. We should all be scared. I know a lot of parents are, and they do not

know what to do to stop this. I've been approached by them. "What can we do, Georgie. We are overwhelmed." I'm here to speak for those parents.

It's our job, as adults- to understand the very real costs to youth mental and physical health and the dangers of addiction, and then to make the right decision for them- and for us. Everybody bears the burden of the costs of tobacco use and nicotine addiction- it isn't an individual decision, regardless of what you may be hearing. Not only are there the health care costs, which everybody literally pays for, but there's also the disruptions to family life and student education when they violate school tobacco use policies. It's not just parents- talk to teachers and librarians who say that students cannot sit still in study hall for 45 minutes. They are jittery, irritable and need their nicotine fix. And there's disruptions to community life and the economy. When a parent is out of work because their kid has constant respiratory problems due to irritation from the second and thirdhand smoke, this costs our economy money. When chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease skyrocket, that costs money. When Washington County has to pay for one of the highest rates of cancer in the state, that costs money.³ When Washington County families have to deal with one of the highest cancer mortality rates in the state,⁴ there's no amount of money that can make up for that.

Tobacco use and nicotine addiction costs us money and it costs us family members- and it starts with young people. Almost no one starts a nicotine habit as an adult.⁵ It starts with young people getting addicted, and right now, it's the flavors that are getting them hooked.⁶

We need to protect our kids. This is non-negotiable. This IS OUR responsibility as adults and we need your help. Ending the sale of flavored tobacco including the sale of menthol will help to reduce our youth exposure to products that are designed to addict them and provide the tobacco companies with life-long customers. Our neighbor, Massachusetts banned the sales of flavored tobacco AND menthol in June, 2020. And just last month, our neighbor Vermont passed a flavored tobacco ban that included menthol. It is Maine's turn to step up to the plate!

Please vote to support LD 1215, An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco. Thank you.

1-https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/menthol/index.html#:~:text=Menthol%20enhances%20the%20effect%20of,more%20difficult%20to%20quit%20smoking

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<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/public-health-systems/lphd/district7/documents/washington-county-profile-2021-updated5-7-21-mpha.pdf>

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<https://www11.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/public-health-systems/data-research/vital-records/mcr/reports/documents/2022%20Maine%20Annual%20Cancer%20Snapshot%20final.pdf>.

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<https://www11.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/public-health-systems/data-research/vital-records/mcr/reports/documents/2022%20Maine%20Annual%20Cancer%20Snapshot%20final.pdf>

5 https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/youth_data/tobacco_use/index.htm

6 US Department of Health and Human Services. 2016. E-Cigarette use among youth and young adults: A report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Office on Smoking and Health.