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Maine Legislature
Committee On Health and Human Services
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

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My name is Christine Peters. I am the Chief Operating Officer for Maine Smoke Shops. We are a Maine-based company that has 19 stores located here in Maine. We have been proudly employing Mainers for over 24 years.

I should be working in our stores today, but this is too important for me not to be here. On behalf of my business, my employees, and my customers, I want to oppose LD 1215. Simply put, this would be prohibition. If passed, LD 1215 would literally ban the sale of menthol cigarettes, wintergreen dip, flavored cigars, and flavored vapor statewide. That means an adult would not be able to buy their favorite tobacco products from a retail store in their community.

Prohibition didn't work in the 1920s when they banned liquor, it resulted in profound job loss. Yet, despite what history has taught our country, we've got these D.C. lobbyists and Bloomberg-funded groups coming into our state and trying to tell Mainers what they can and cannot buy. What happened to our adult freedoms and the ability to choose?

These same outsiders are trying to say that banning flavored tobacco is all about keeping it away from our youth. We already have a law that do not allow anyone under the age of 21 to purchase tobacco, alcohol, or cannabis. Maine retailers have been and will continue to card our customers to ensure that they are at least 21 to buy any of these products. Tobacco is a legal product reserved for adults just as cannabis and alcohol. Mainers voted to legalize marijuana back in 2016 and that product comes in the form of flavored gummies and vapor. Is our legislature now going to reverse the will of Mainers and ban flavored marijuana products, too?

Don't let these anti-Maine groups steer us away from the real problem, which is the many online sites illegally selling flavored tobacco products to our teens. Maine retailers are not the issue. There is a slew of online sites selling these unregulated flavored vapes from China, and they do not check IDs like Maine retailers do. We need our legislators to crack down if you are serious about protecting our youth.

If this ban goes into effect, it will not keep adults from using flavored tobacco products. They will still be able to buy menthol cigarettes and wintergreen dip over the state line in New Hampshire. Or illegally online. I am afraid that this would be devastating to Maine economy and small business.

Today, I ask our legislators to stop listening to the DC lobbyists and Bloomberg who are not looking out for Mainers. They will not stick around to see the aftermath of how such policies will have devastated Maine and inevitably done nothing to protect our youth as they promised.

Please stop this ill-advised policy from moving forward and vote NO on LD 1215.