

LD 1215: An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

Testimony of Annemarie Swanson, Winslow

April 25, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Annemarie Swanson, and I was the principal of the Indian Island School. I am a Maine Children's Alliance board member, and a resident of Winslow. I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1215, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products. Protecting the health and wellbeing of Maine's youth and ensuring they are not targeted by the tobacco industry is why I am here.

The Maine Children's Alliance is a public policy, nonprofit improving the lives of Maine children, youth and families through research, collaboration, and advocacy. For over 25 years, MCA has promoted sound policies and best practices to make sure all Maine children have the resources and opportunity to reach their full potential.

Flavored tobacco products are often marketed to young people, using colorful packaging and sweet flavors, like bubble gum, appealing to children. As a result, many young people start using these products at an early age, and become addicted to nicotine before they even graduate from middle school. I saw how nicotine affects memory, ability to pay attention and impulse control—all important components to learning—in and out of my 40 years in classrooms.

In this year's Maine KIDS COUNT Data Book, that we produce at Maine Children's Alliance, we note that vaping nicotine products can be harmful to the developing brain and lead to health challenges. Drug use typically begins during adolescence and young adulthood. In addition, youth who use tobacco are more likely to develop major health problems including lung cancer. According to the 2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, nearly one third of Maine's high school students reported e-cigarette use. Alarming, one Juul pod contains as much nicotine as 20 cigarettes --but with the fruity, sweet flavors these products come in, many learners don't realize these products contain nicotine, let alone that they're quickly developing an insatiable nicotine addiction with a slew of physical, mental, and emotional consequences.

Our students today have enough on their plates without having to struggle with nicotine addiction. By ending the sale of flavored tobacco products, we can help to protect our students from the harmful physical and mental effects. This legislation will make it more difficult for young people to access these products, and will send a clear message that our communities prioritize their health and well-being.

As a long-time elementary school educator, I have seen the devastating impact that tobacco use can have on our young people. I am committed to doing everything in my power to support the success and well-being of my students. That is why the Maine Children's Alliance strongly supports this bill, and we urge you to take action to protect our young people from the harms of flavored tobacco products by voting "YES" on LD 1215.