



Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Ray Ruby and I live in Portland. I am the Executive Director of Maine Cancer Foundation and am here today to testify in favor of LD 1215, “An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.”

Maine Cancer Foundation is a statewide organization, based in Falmouth. Our organization is dedicated to reducing cancer incidence and mortality rates in Maine. One hundred percent of the funds we raise are invested back into our communities to benefit the people of Maine. To reduce the impact of cancer in our state, MCF awards grants statewide that support cancer prevention, screening, and access to care efforts.

Cancer is the leading cause of death in our state, and Maine’s cancer rates are consistently higher than national averages. I am submitting testimony today because of the detrimental role tobacco plays in Maine’s cancer burden. Indeed, preventing tobacco use is key to our mission and critical to reducing cancer in Maine. Tobacco is known to cause 12 different cancers, including lung cancer at the forefront. Lung cancer is responsible for the most cancer deaths in Maine, and far too many of our family, friends, and neighbors will be diagnosed with lung and tobacco-related cancers this year.

How do we combat this heavy cancer burden? We need to start with prevention – ensuring Maine youth never pick up a tobacco product in the first place. We know tobacco use and nicotine addiction start during youth. And, unfortunately, the tobacco companies know this as well. Ninety-five percent of adults who smoke, start by the age of 21. Data also show that 1 in 5 Maine high school students are currently using a tobacco product, which is higher than the national average. That’s because Maine youth are targeted by tobacco companies with enticing flavors and marketing that ignores the risk of a lifelong nicotine addiction.

As staff at Maine Cancer Foundation and father of two young daughters, these numbers are frightening.

But I have hope for the future. I have hope that my children won’t encounter these types of products on the shelves, where they have to differentiate between a candy treat and a tobacco product. I have hope that Mainers won’t ever have to hear the words “you have cancer” because they were targeted by tobacco companies as children.

It’s time to end the sale of flavored tobacco products in Maine. Please vote ‘yes’ on LD 1215. This is a vote that doesn’t just impact our work, it also hits home.