



Solutions for a
Toxic-Free Tomorrow

Testimony of Sarah Woodbury, Director of Advocacy, Defend Our Health
IN SUPPORT of LD 1215 "An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products"
Before the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services
April 25, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Sarah Woodbury, and I am the director of advocacy for Defend Our Health. Defend Our Health's mission is to make sure that everyone has equal access to safe food and drinking water, healthy homes, and products that are toxic-free and climate friendly. I am here to testify in support of LD 1215 "An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products".

Defend Our Health works at the intersection of the environment and health, particularly the health of the most vulnerable among us, which includes children. The issue of flavored tobacco cuts across both the issues and impacts the health and environment of all Mainers.

E-cigarette waste has the potential to be a more serious environmental threat than cigarette butts. E-cigarettes introduce plastic, nicotine salts, heavy metals, lead, mercury, and flammable lithium-ion batteries into waterways, soil, and to wildlife. These toxic chemicals can harm our environment and the health of our children. Lead is a potent neurotoxin that robs children of their potential by irreversibly damaging their brain and lowering their IQ. It is widely accepted by health scientists as well as Federal agencies, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention¹ and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency² that there is no identifiable safe level of lead. Additionally, unlike cigarette butts, e-cigarette waste doesn't biodegrade even under severe conditions. E-cigarettes left on the street eventually break down into microplastics and chemicals that flow into the storm drains to pollute our waterways and wildlife.

While the tobacco industry will try to argue that this isn't the case, flavored tobacco is marketed towards children. I have a much younger sister. She vapes. She started vaping in high school. She did her best to hide it from me, but I eventually found out. When I gave her a hard time about it, she basically said she likes the flavors. Flavors that are marketed to children. Flavors such as gummy bear and birthday cake are designed to entice children to use their products in hopes of creating a life-long customer that will spend hundreds if not thousands of dollars on tobacco products over their lifespan. Unfortunately, that lifespan may not be that long due to the

¹ "No safe blood lead level in children has been identified. Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to affect IQ, the ability to pay attention, and academic achievement."

<https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/prevention/default.htm>

² "No safe level of lead exposure has been identified." 84 FR 61724 (2019).



health impacts of tobacco use. Smoking increases risks of certain types of cancers, emphysema, and heart disease.

I lost my mother and my maternal grandmother to pancreatic cancer. Both were heavy smokers who started smoking menthols at a young age. Both died before their 63rd birthday because of it. My maternal grandmother in her mid-50s and my mother at age 62. Both started smoking back before the health impacts of tobacco weren't as well known. We know better now. We know the health impacts. We know that tobacco is the leading cost of preventable death in Maine. We know that health care costs of tobacco use costs Mainers hundreds of millions of dollars. We know that 95% of smokers started their tobacco use by the age of 21 and we know that those who don't start smoking by that age are unlikely to start using tobacco. We need to do all we can to protect our environment from the damage inflicted by these toxic materials. And, most importantly, we need to do all we can to protect our children and families from the health impacts of tobacco use. That is why Defend Our Health urges the committee to vote unanimously "ought to pass" on LD 1215.

Thank you.