

Testimony of Allyson Perron Drag, Vice President of Government Relation, Eastern Region, American Heart Association for portions of LD 210 "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027"

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, the American Heart Association is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke, whose mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. The American Heart Association is offering testimony on portions of the Governor's biennial budget proposal related to cardiovascular disease.

We applaud the Governor for including an increase in tobacco taxes. We believe that by taking this action and with your support we can ensure the State's commitment to protecting the health and well-being of all Mainers, especially children. Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable disease and death in Maine. The harms from using tobacco products are regressive, leaving some communities to suffer disproportionately from tobacco-related diseases, disability, death and significant health care costs. By prompting more people to quit and cut back their use of tobacco products, raising tobacco taxes will reduce both the regressive harms and costs.

The \$1 proposed increase would bring the tax from \$2 to \$3 per pack of 20 cigarettes. Maine has long been a leader in fully funding its tobacco prevention and cessation programs at levels recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These programs are vital for educating the public about the dangers of tobacco and providing resources to help individuals quit. We hope that this proposal will continue to support these essential, life-saving initiatives through the critical funding that is generated by the tax. Evidence shows that tobacco taxes improve public health, save lives, and lower healthcare costs, creating a ripple effect of positive outcomes across the state.

Maine has one of the lowest cigarette taxes in New England – and the highest smoking rate. Cigarette taxes are one of the most effective ways to reduce smoking, which is the #1 cause of preventable death in Maine and costs our state \$942 million in health care expenditures annually. Increasing the cigarette tax by \$1.00 per pack would:

- Decrease youth smoking in Maine by 7%.
- Encourage 3,200 adult smokers in Maine to quit.
- Prevent 900 premature deaths.
- Save Maine \$48.84 million in health care costs.
- Raise crucial revenue to help balance the state budget and offset the tremendous costs that tobacco use causes for the state.

We look forward to working with you to ensure this important proposal becomes law. Together, we can build a healthier, tobacco-free future for all Mainers. We appreciate your time and consideration of our comments. I would be happy to answer any questions about this testimony.

Sincerely,

Allyson Perron Drag

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