

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"

Monday, February 3, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and honorable members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Sen. Grohoski, Rep. Cloutier and members of the Committee on Taxation. My name is Dr. Seth Blank and I am here to testify in support of the \$1 dollar increase to the tobacco tax in Maine.

Although the \$1 increase in the tobacco tax is proposed in order to help close the projected budget shortfall, it has the additional benefit of helping to save lives while simultaneously reducing healthcare costs. Studies have shown that a 10% increase in the tax on tobacco (\$1 out of an average \$10/pack) will lead to a 4% decrease in smoking overall. For children under 18 years old, the decrease would be 7%. This leads to 700 people who never become adult smokers plus 3,200 current adult smokers who quit, resulting in 900 premature smoking related deaths prevented and a long term savings in health care costs of \$48.84 million dollars. Maine has a much higher rate of lung cancer mortality than the national average, ranking 44th out of all the states. It has been shown that the health benefits of increasing the tax on tobacco significantly benefits people with lower incomes. Analysis of the results of the 2009 federal tax increase on tobacco showed that 46% of the lives saved were in the lower income bracket.

Having performed Cardiac and Thoracic surgery in Maine for over thirty years, I know firsthand the human suffering that is caused by smoking. Smoking is the largest cause of preventable heart disease and the number one cause of lung cancer. Heart disease is the leading cause of death overall, and lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death. Smoking is responsible for 1 in 5 deaths in the United States.

As someone who too often sees firsthand the dire consequences of tobacco use, I urge the committee to support a tax increase on all tobacco products. Doing so will reduce suffering from cancer and other tobacco related diseases, saving lives and saving long term healthcare costs for all Mainers. I thank the Committee for the opportunity to make these comments.