

***Testimony in Support of Increasing the Tobacco Tax in LD 210***  
***Ed Miller, MS***

February 3, 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs  
Joint Standing Committee on Taxation

*Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation:*

My name is Ed Miller, I'm a long-time public health advocate and former CEO of the American Lung Association in Maine. I live in Hallowell and am testifying in support of the tobacco tax increase that's included in LD 210 because it will help ensure that the next generation of Maine kids can grow up free from tobacco addiction and harm.

In the 1990's and early 2000's Maine increased the tobacco tax and took other steps to reign in smoking. Back then I advocated for the tax increase because research showed raising the price of tobacco would put these harmful products further out of reach for young people, which is key because almost all tobacco use starts when someone's in middle or high school. Looking back, that's how it played out. Thanks to the tobacco tax increase and other measures, youth smoking rates dropped 15 percent in a handful of years, and we saw a meaningful decrease in adult smoking as well.<sup>1</sup> The statewide Quitline was flooded with calls for help quitting smoking.

But then Maine fell behind. It's been 20 years since we raised the tobacco tax. The progress we saw in reducing tobacco use slowed, especially compared to other states in New England. Nearly 1 in 5 Maine high schoolers are currently using a tobacco product.<sup>2</sup> We have the highest adult smoking rate and the highest overall cancer rate in New England. Yet our tobacco tax is among the lowest in the region. With grocery prices on the rise, soon it might actually be cheaper to buy a pack of cigarettes in Maine than a carton of eggs.

Tobacco use is jeopardizing the bright futures of so many young people in Maine. And they can't fight the tobacco industry on their own.

In addition to raising the tobacco tax, we should also ensure a portion of the funding goes toward programs to help current tobacco users quit, specifically into the Fund for a Healthy Maine. That way, we're both working to ensure young people never pick up a tobacco product in the first place, and we're also supporting people who smoke in their efforts to quit – one of the hardest things a person can do.

I urge you to support the \$1 increase in the cigarette excise tax from \$2 to \$3 per pack in LD 210, which will have a corresponding increase in other tobacco products as well. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Governor Janet Mills, "Updating Maine's Cigarette and Other Tobacco Products Excise Taxes to Strengthen Public Health, Generate Additional Revenue," Jan 10, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Maine Department of Health and Human Services, *Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS)*, 2023.