

Testimony of Mary Lou Warn, Volunteer Advocate

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

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 Mary Lou Warn from Winslow, and I am here to testify in support of the \$1 dollar increase on the tobacco tax in Maine.

I am a volunteer advocate with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. Tobacco use and nicotine addiction has impacted my family. My father in law passed away from throat cancer at age 52, and both of my parents were long time smokers before finally being able to quit 30 years ago. They struggle with many long term health problems, including COPD. My father uses an oxygen tank to get through his day, and his only life regret is smoking.

I have 2 children, Jake 25 and Carly 22. They were well educated on the harms of cigarettes. I believed we were doing a good job and felt confident the next generation would not use tobacco products. Instead we let our guard down. I quickly learned how big tobacco companies targeted our youth. Jake was 16 when I discovered he was vaping. Jake tried to assure me he had done his research. Vaping was nothing like cigarettes, he could stop anytime. At that time I found no information to counter the message he and his friends were led to believe.

I was surprised to learn that the state had done little to educate Maine parents and children about the harm of these dangerous products. Meanwhile vape shops popped up all over town, school bathrooms became known as vape rooms and students had trouble getting through the day without a nicotine fix. We lost so much ground on the fight against tobacco use and nicotine addiction.

As a college student athlete Jake was seeing adverse effects to his health, attention, learning, mood and also his bank account. A recent study by The Truth initiative states health, cost and desire to escape addiction drives young people to quit vaping. *

I support the \$1 dollar increase on the tobacco tax in Maine. We cannot afford to let our guard down again and must continue to use resources for the health of Mainers and we must keep our promise to our kids and protect them from these dangerous addictive products.

*Teens and young adults enrolled in the quit vaping program from Truth Initiative said they were driven to quit because of concerns about health (50.9%), cost (21.7%), the desire to be free from addiction (16%) and social factors such as others' impressions of them (10.1%), according to a Truth Initiative® study.

<https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/quitting-smoking-vaping/health-cost-and-desire-escape-addiction-drives-young#:~:text=Teens%20and%20young%20adults%20enrolled,a%20Truth%20Initiative%20study>