

January 31, 2025

Testimony of Chris Beaulier, Director of Retail Operations, Cigarette Shopper, Brewer, Maine, in Opposition to Budget Bill Provision Increasing Tobacco Taxes

**To: Joint Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,
Maine State Legislature**

Chair Gattine, Chair Rotundo, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Chris Beaulier and I am the Director of Retail Operations for Cigarette Shopper. I am also a lifelong resident of Maine, currently residing in the Town of Newburgh. We operate 22 "tobacco-only" and one full line convenience store throughout Maine and employ approximately 100 people. I am here to oppose the 50% increase in tobacco taxes in the budget.

We train our employees well to ensure that underage people do not enter our stores or purchase tobacco products. In fact, over the past 14 years, the FDA has inspected our stores to determine compliance 292 times, and in only two instances were we out of compliance by offering tobacco products to underage persons; that is over 99% compliance. Our stores are not causing a problem with youth and tobacco products.

Increasing taxes will not do anything to protect young people. It will also not have any impact on the consumption of tobacco products in Maine. All it will do is drive sales from legitimate Maine retailers like my company to one of two places: New Hampshire, where, for example, the tax on a carton of cigarettes would be over \$12.00 less than in Maine, or illegal, unlicensed sellers of products who will get products in New Hampshire or wherever else they are legal, bring them into Maine and sell them to whoever has the cash to buy them.

Because lower income citizens and those with lower educational backgrounds have higher rates of smoking compared to the rest of the population, the tax increase would raise money for all Maine citizens at the expense of this small group of adult tobacco customers. Why put an extra burden on less educated and lower income people to take sales away from legitimate Maine businesses like mine, and give it to New Hampshire retailers or to criminals? That does not sound like a policy that is in the best interests of Maine, or of Maine youth, and it certainly is not in the interest of my business or my employees, whose jobs would be in danger if this bill passes.

Please support Maine businesses and youth and oppose this tax increase.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have.