



Testimony in Support of LD 1658, *An Act to Preserve and Strengthen the Fund for a Healthy Maine* and LD 1772, *An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission to Design a Plan for Sustained Investment in Preventing Disease and Improving the Health of Maine Communities*

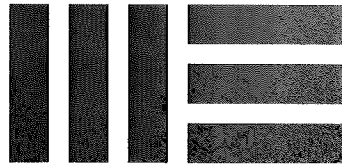
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Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Alex Carter, I use she/her pronouns, and I am a Senior Policy Advocate at Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit civil legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. As a member of the Blue Ribbon Commission to Design a Plan for Sustained Investment in Preventing Disease and Improving the Health of Maine Communities, I am testifying in support of both LD 1658 and LD 1772, as amended.

The Fund for a Healthy Maine (FHM) was created to receive Maine's tobacco settlement payments and allocate those payments to support the treatment and prevention of chronic disease and the promotion of individual and population level health. However, due to the decline in tobacco settlement payments, which are based on national sales of combustion cigarettes (vapes, nicotine pouches, and cannabis are not included), the FHM and the programs it supports face a financial deficit if Maine lawmakers do not act.

Both LD 1658 and LD 1772 create pathways toward financial solvency and the long-term sustainability of the FHM. In keeping with the recommendations put forth by the 2024 Blue Ribbon Commission, LD 1658 would create an annual transfer of a percentage of the tobacco excise tax revenue from the General Fund to the FHM. This not only addresses the fund's financial shortfall, but it would also add an important element of equity. People with low income pay the price of commercial tobacco twice—first when they are targeted by the tobacco industry through predatory marketing and advertising in low-income communities and second when they lose a higher percentage of their limited incomes to tobacco taxes.¹

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco-health-equity/collection/low-ses-unfair-and-unjust.html>



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On average, people with low-income are higher users of cigarettes² and therefore most impacted by the increase in tobacco taxes and the health complications related to tobacco use. It's only fair that a portion of the tax being levied against lower-income people would be invested back into their health care coverage, public health interventions, and the community conditions that improve and support good health, including access to nutritious foods, safe and stable housing, and preventive care.

LD 1772 similarly charts a course for greater fiscal responsibility by establishing a Fund for a Healthy Maine Stabilization Account, eliminating the need for a working capital advance and creating more financial stability for the FHM-funded programs. It would also bring more expertise and data-driven best practices into the state's public health planning and decision-making by forming a commission of experts to assist and advise the Maine Legislature on public health policy and the structure of the FHM.

As attacks on public health and public benefits continue at the federal level, it's more important than ever that Maine work to protect our state funding dedicated to addressing health disparities, preventing disease, and improving the conditions in which people live and grow. Please support LD 1658 and LD 1772 and a healthy future for all Mainers.

² https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/resources/data/cigarette-smoking-in-united-states.html#by_income