

Testimony in Support of LD 1772 and LD 1658

Senator Inwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Renee Page, Executive Director at Healthy Communities of the Capital Area (HCCA), a public health primary prevention organization in Hallowell. I am testifying in favor of LDs 1772 and 1658, which will strengthen and solidify Maine's public health efforts.

Maine has an almost 30-year history of successfully leveraging Master Tobacco Settlement dollars through the Fund for a Healthy Maine. These funds are used to implement primary prevention strategies to address costly and deleterious effects of chronic disease and addiction through a statewide network of local community-based public health organizations and other partners. This structure and the Fund have been threatened by proposed shifts, cuts, and restructuring time and time again often resulting in disruptions in services, efforts, and results. The missing link is what LD 1772 proposes.

This bill establishes the Maine Commission on Public Health and Prevention to assist and advise the Legislature on evidence-based public health policies that will in turn solidify processes and plans for Maine's public health future to ensure public health needs are met, emerging threats are addressed, and outcomes achieved. This is an exciting opportunity for Maine to implement a Commission to provide the ongoing stability and guidance needed to prioritize public health issues and address them.

Public health primary prevention strategies supported by the Fund for a Healthy Maine are needed more than ever. Though Maine has a successful track record of reducing cigarette use and stemming the tide of opioid addiction, there is still a lot of work to be done to address emerging threats like vaping and other chronic disease indicators like poor diet, lack of physical activity, isolation, and more. To successfully mitigate these drivers of disease and addiction, Maine must have a solid, consistent implementation plan and the funding to support it. Healthcare costs continue to skyrocket, and more Mainers are losing access to healthcare coverage and healthcare facilities. The best way to lessen this burden is to help people get and remain healthy for as long as possible, which is what public health primary prevention does.

LD 1772 will support implementation of a well thought out plan that includes public health professionals, the Legislature, and Maine CDC to ensure less disruption of progress and secure funding into the future.

LD 1658 goes a step further to solidify a state funding stream for tobacco prevention and treatment efforts. This helps close the gap from decreasing Master Tobacco Settlement payments over time and only makes sense that some of the revenue from a tobacco tax would support prevention and treatment.

I respectfully request you to vote in favor of LD 1772 and LD 1658 to help solidify Maine's public health infrastructure. Thank you.

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