

Laura Bogorad
Tobacco free kids

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Laura Bogorad, I live in Waterville, Maine and I am a student at Colby College, here today to testify in favor of LD 1550, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

Over the last month, I have been working as an intern research aid for Tobacco Free Kids. I have learned so much. I wanted to volunteer for this campaign because I've seen firsthand that teenagers get addicted to nicotine from flavored e-cigarettes. When I started high school nobody smoked, then suddenly everyone started smoking Juuls. First it was at parties, then during school hours. Between every class the bathroom was crowded with e-cigarette smoking classmates. Every once and a while the administration would find a Juul on the ground and start an investigation, but it was fruitless because everyone smoked. When people offered me to use their Juuls they would always say, "It's strawberry, want to try?" No one ever acknowledged we were smoking nicotine, only which new flavors they had gotten. I don't think any of us would have smoked unless there were flavors.

Since volunteering on this project, I have reached out to over 50 businesses, coaches and community members. Not once have I had a business say no, I am not interested. Sure, some don't feel comfortable speaking out, but for those folks who have been willing to enter the political fray. Speaking with coaches especially has helped me see that e-cigarette usage remains an issue in the Maine community among teens. They see that problem within their student athletes across the board, not just in one school or one friend group but across the state. And they want to see Maine make a change.

I also want to highlight the remarks submitted by the Mayor of Bangor, Dan Tremble, who is also the owner of the Fairmount Market. In his written testimony, submitted to you, the Mayor says:

I am submitting testimony as the owner and operator of the Fairmount Market. If you're ever in Bangor, come by. We were finalists in the Bangor Daily News' competition for best local pizza, and I think we make the best sandwiches in town.

We opened our doors in 1925, and have been serving the neighborhood around Fairmount and Fifth Street Parks ever since. We get all walks of life coming through our doors, and we try to have something special for everyone, including some tobacco products. While we don't sell flavored vaping products, we do sell some menthol flavored tobacco. And, of course, if we end the sale of all flavored tobacco including menthol, I might lose some revenue, but not enough to make it worthwhile to endanger our kids.

Our market is part of the community. We try to give back as much as we can. One of the things we do for the neighborhood is sponsor a local little league team. In 2019, our team won the West Side Little League Championship! I'm proud of those kids. I go to the games when I can and cheer them on. And it would break my heart if I saw one of them vaping or smoking cigarettes.

There's no way I want to sponsor a Little League team and turn around the next day and put those same kids at risk of tobacco addiction. So as I've learned more about flavored tobacco, including menthol, I can easily stand here today and say 'get these things off the market'. Luring kids into a lifetime of addiction is no business I want to be in, and I bet there are plenty of store owners around the state who feel the same way.

Flavored tobacco products are clearly targeted at getting our children hooked on tobacco. Just look at the list of flavors sold: brown sugar graham cracker, hot cocoa, nectarine and chill, orange creamsicle, and zombie. These aren't adult flavors – these are putting a bulls-eye on every kid in our communities.

So, why do they sell them in all those flavors? I now know the answer is pretty clear, 97% of adult smokers started before the age of 21. In order to strengthen their place in the market, tobacco companies need to get kids hooked to have future customers.

Let me just say again that ending the sale of menthol cigarettes is just as important as getting rid of flavored vaping products. For too long these cigarettes have been marketed to people of color and have resulted in a lifetime of addiction. I bet everyone around this room can name someone in their family who started smoking menthols and found themselves addicted. Hopefully most were fortunate to quit, but too many die early and it's all preventable. So, if we are going to end the sale of flavored tobacco, it has to include menthol since it is the largest flavor sold.

Ending the sale of all flavored tobacco and vaping products will lower the rate of youth smoking. This will lower the rate of tobacco related disease and a lifetime of addiction. There are health experts testifying on the devastating impacts of addiction to tobacco. They definitely know more than me. But, I want to share my biggest concern: the impact of smoking on the cognitive development of our kids – on their ability to learn, do well in school, and join the workforce in our communities. My hope for the kids on my little league team, and for all children, is that they be given the opportunity to reach their full potential. Addiction to nicotine limits that opportunity and leaves too many kids behind.

We are the adults here. We have the power to protect our children from something we know, with absolute certainty, will adversely impact their futures.

When you get ready to cast your vote on LD 1550, remember that menthol cigarettes, and mint-flavored chew, and banana cream pie vaping products are a cynical strategy to addict our children to tobacco.

It is time to end the sale of flavored tobacco products. Please support LD 1550, and put our kids development and future success first. And for those of you with kids and grandkids playing Little League, watch out for the Fairview Market Cubs! We're looking to be state champions next year! Thank you for your time and commitment to kids' health.

Several of my friends got nicotine patches together and were trying to quit. They couldn't make it the school day without a smoke break. It was upsetting to see my friends struggle with a nicotine addiction. I've seen firsthand that flavored e-cigarettes can cause teens to go from someone that would never smoke to a cigarette user, and I believe laws like these would positively impact teens in immeasurable ways.