

MaineHealth

MaineHealth Local Health Systems

Franklin Community
Health Network
LincolnHealth
MaineHealth Care At Home
Maine Behavioral Healthcare
Memorial Hospital
Maine Medical Center
Mid Coast-Parkview Health
NorDx
Pen Bay Medical Center
Southern Maine Health Care
Synernet
Waldo County General Hospital
Western Maine Health

Part of the MaineHealth Family

MaineHealth Accountable
Care Organization

MaineHealth Affiliates

MaineGeneral Health
New England Rehabilitation
Hospital of Portland
St. Mary's Health System

Annie Coates, MD, MaineHealth Testimony in Support of LD 1550

“An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products” Friday, May 7, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Dr. Annie Coates, and I am one of four pediatric pulmonologists in Maine. I am here today to testify on behalf of MaineHealth in support of LD 1550, “An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.”

MaineHealth is Maine’s largest integrated non-profit health care system that provides a full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. Every day, MaineHealth’s over 23,000 employees are committed to fulfilling our vision of “working together so our communities are the healthiest in America.”

MaineHealth has long supported strong tobacco prevention and treatment programs for our patients, employees and communities – we know that tobacco use is one of the most preventable health problems facing our state and nation. In 2001, we established the Maine Center for Tobacco Independence (CTI). In partnership with the Maine Centers for Disease Prevention and Control, MaineHealth implements the Maine QuitLink, training for health care providers and other professionals throughout the state, and technical assistance regarding tobacco-free policies.

Additionally, in 2016, MaineHealth partnered with the Maine CDC to implement and lead Domain 2: Tobacco Use and Exposure Prevention. As part of Maine Prevention Services, the MaineHealth Center for Tobacco Independence works with 16 community organizations to create tobacco and smoke-free environments across Maine, and help Maine youth and young adults be tobacco-free.

Despite the FDA’s ban on flavored cigarettes in 2009, over a decade later, the overall market for flavored tobacco products is growing. Continuing a long tradition of designing products that appeal explicitly to new users, tobacco companies in recent years have significantly stepped up the introduction and marketing of flavored other tobacco products (OTPs), particularly e-cigarettes and cigars, as well as smokeless tobacco and hookah. With their colorful packaging and sweet flavors, today’s flavored tobacco products are often hard to distinguish from the candy displays near which they are frequently placed in retail outlets.

Although tobacco companies claim to be responding to adult tobacco users’ demand for variety, flavored tobacco products play a key role in enticing new

users, particularly children, to a lifetime of addiction. This growing market for flavored tobacco products is undermining the nation's overall progress in reducing youth tobacco use.

Let's review the facts.

- One in four Maine high school students now uses e-cigarettes – a rate that has nearly doubled in the past two years.
- Eight out of ten middle and high school students who use e-cigarettes use flavored products.
- While almost all e-cigarettes contain nicotine, more than half of Maine youth who use e-cigarettes say they think it's just harmless flavoring.

These aren't just figures on a paper. These are our children. I would like to share one truly heartbreaking story with you.

Three months ago, I was consulted on a previously healthy adolescent who was admitted to the Barbara Bush Children's Hospital Pediatric Intensive Care Unit in respiratory failure. Over the past year, he endorsed smoking flavored e-cigarettes (supplied by "friends") daily. His impression at the time was that he was inhaling "just flavored water, doc and they won't get me addicted like those awful cigarettes my parents can't beat." What he didn't understand was the extent of the harmful effects of e-cigarettes and that they did likely have nicotine in them, which he had since become addicted to, and directly contributed to his critical health condition. But, the damage didn't just stop there for him. He had gone from being "a good student" to skipping school to smoke, which resulted in failing multiple classes. Furthermore, he developed a multitude of other daily symptoms (headaches, difficulty concentrating, and abdominal pain) all that can be attributed to nicotine addiction.

There are now over 15,000 flavored tobacco products on the market. Flavored tobacco products, including cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, and e-cigarettes, undermine Maine's efforts to reduce youth tobacco use.

Before I close, I want to address a misconception that you will likely hear later this morning. E-cigarettes are not an FDA-approved cessation method. For individuals looking for support to quit smoking, vaping, or other tobacco use, I encourage them to contact the Maine QuitLink at 1-800-QUIT-NOW for free support and coaching. This is evidenced-based and effective - The Phone Coaching Program quit rate (30-day) is 36% for tobacco users that complete at least 4 calls of the multi-call program, compared to unassisted quit rates are generally reported as approximately 3%.

As a pediatric pulmonologist, as a mother, as a resident of Maine who has dedicated my career to the health of our communities, please use your voice, your vote and support this critical legislation. The wellbeing of our youth, the African American community and other minority populations depend on it.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.