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Aurora

LD 1550: An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products  
Testimony of Sonya Connelly, Aurora, Maine  
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Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Sonya Connelly and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1550, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

In 2020, I began working in the public health arena for the first time. Most of that work is in primary prevention with a focus on obesity, resiliency, and tobacco.

In this role, I have been working in partnership with Flavors Hook Kids Maine to end the sale of flavored tobacco.

I always knew that tobacco was harmful. My grandfather smoked menthol cigarettes for 20 years, and both my parents smoked. My parents' addictions to nicotine also made it easier for them to use other substances. My grandfather ultimately died of lung cancer and both of my parents died due to their addictions.

So, I understood the harmful impact but what I really didn't understand was how targeted flavored tobacco is to our children. There are over 15,000 flavored, "yummy" and harmless sounding products that scream to kids to give them a try. The tobacco industry knows that if they can addict their consumers young, they might just have them for life.

It's hard to imagine any legislation that would have more of an impact on our children of today and the generations to come.

Over these months, I have met many people who are passionate about this topic but couldn't join us today. I'd like to share their stories.

Sue Sell from Machias, Maine

I quit smoking 28 years ago. I started when I was 17. I quickly switched to menthol which was a game changer for me. I could smoke more and it seemed so soothing. It took smoking to a whole new level.

Later in life, the chronic coughing started. I would cough all night long and I couldn't sleep. I knew it was because of the tobacco and I had to stop. I now have grandkids and I don't want that life for them. Let's get rid of flavored tobacco which includes menthol.

Another Story, Sara McConnell of Lubec, Maine.

Flavors hooked ME! Growing up my parents and grandparents all smoked. During middle school I decided to give it a try. I took a liking to my Dad's menthols. I continued to smoke for over 16 years. It wasn't until my Dad, at the age of 49, died of lung cancer and after many attempts, that I finally quit.

My brother still smokes, and I really worry about my niece and nephew. Flavors hook Maine kids - let's put an end to flavored tobacco!

Thank you for allowing me to share my own story and a few from my surrounding communities. At this time, I can answer any questions you may have.