

Testimony of Lani Graham, MD, MPH
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IN SUPPORT OF LD 1550

An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

Presented by Representative Michele Meyer

Before the Health and Human Services Committee: May 7, 2021

Good Morning, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee. My name is Lani Graham. I am a retired family practice physician and former Chief Public Health officer for Maine. Currently I serve on the Public Health Committee for the Maine Medical Association (MMA)

I have been involved in tobacco prevention and control for at least 30 years, but over the years I have been consistently impressed by the creativity and determination of the Tobacco Industry to assure the continued use of its product. Doctors have actually flogged the tobacco use, filter-tips have been introduced, women have been persuaded to believe that tobacco made them glamorous, and through it all the tragic and needless deaths have continued. But in some ways, the introduction of flavored tobacco products has been the most creative and deadly invention of them all. With flavored products the Industry is able to lure in the very best customers, youth, and create a strong addiction before someone is even out of high school. Better yet, the Industry is able to target low-income girls and boys with the drama of sophistication and variety. For the health of Maine's next generation, the invention of flavored tobacco products has been a public health disaster and we have been "asleep at the switch" until now.

As of 2021, the United States and Maine are getting a handle on the Covid epidemic. With luck, we may be out of the Covid woods by 2022. But meanwhile the Tobacco Epidemic continues to rage and without strong action, as represented by this bill, is likely to get worse. In 2020 the leading killer in Maine was not Covid, but heart disease, followed by cancer, both strongly linked to tobacco use. During Covid, there has

been justifiable concern about overwhelming health care resources. Fortunately, through all our work that has not happened. But continuing to turn a blind eye to the addiction of Maine youth through flavored products will almost guarantee that health care resources will continue to be overwhelmed by preventable illness. This is especially true for the rural parts of Maine, where the health care system is already fragmented and fragile.

It has been said that if we ban these products, we may lose tax revenue. Aside from being an amazingly cynical argument, it seems like a price worth paying for a new generation of healthy Mainers.

Thank you for your attention. I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.