

Written Testimony (May 7th, 2021):

Hello,

My name is Justin and I'm a senior at Colby College, currently doing an internship at Verrill Dana. One of my projects has been interviewing retailers about their views on ending the sale of flavored tobacco products.

Growing up, the only people I remember who used tobacco products were my grandparents. Which is a good thing right? A generational habit that seemed to be dying out, or at least that is what I thought. My grandfather, who sailed over to the United States from Ireland, always had a stylish pipe hanging from the side of his mouth, a cherry flavored tobacco scent filled the room with his presence. My other grandfather smoked an alarming amount of menthol cigarettes. The unforgettable stain of menthol cigarettes was engraved into his car, rugs, and clothing. The menthol cigarettes ended up killing my grandfather, and my other grandfather who smokes the pipe is alive at 95 years old. Interesting how one inhaled the menthol and the other never inhaled the pipe. Since working on this campaign, I've learned the truth about menthol cigarettes, and how the menthol acts as a mask to make inhaling cigarettes deeper and easier on the lungs. Those menthol cigarettes tricked my grandfather, and we have the opportunity here to prevent that from happening to kids.

Personally, I was one of those kids who got duped and started vaping in high school. Any allowance or summer employment funds went directly to Juul products. I remember the frenzy at school concerning where and how to get Mango flavored Juul pods. I would take bathroom breaks during class to take smoke breaks, sitting on the toilet with my pants buckled using the flavored e-cigarette rather than using the bathroom and getting back to school work. I played two varsity sports in high school (lacrosse & ice hockey) and boy did I suck wind. I deeply felt the effects of the tobacco products in my performance.

The scary thing was not just that I was 17 years old partaking in flavored e-cigarettes. The scarier thing was that 14-year-old freshmen were doing it as well. When I left high school in June of 2017, I could not believe how many kids were smoking e-cigarettes, and of course they were not legally allowed to be involved.

Over the past few weeks I have reached out to over 65 businesses in Waterville, Auburn, Lewiston, and Kennebunkport. Almost every business was eager to hear more. During all of those phone calls, not once did someone respond saying they do not agree with this legislation. The sobering experience of contacting businesses and store-owners has only reassured me that this bill makes sense. People can get behind this. Here are a few quotations from businesses that support the end of flavored tobacco sales:

Charles Buckley, owner of Kennebunk Outfitters in Kennebunk wrote, "Its time to do a better job protecting our kids from menthol and flavored tobacco products. I support this bill."

Sandy Heldman, who has worked with local youth sports organizations in Auburn, ME for over 40 years and owns the Gee and Bee's Sporting Goods Store in Auburn passionately

states, “I have worked with kids for over 40 years in Auburn. There is nothing more important than ensuring the health of children in Maine. I believe that this bill to end the sale of flavored tobacco and menthol products will drastically improve the quality of life and health of future Maine kids.”

Lou Collins, at Joseph’s Sporting Goods Store in Waterville Maine notes, “We support this bill. I believe all young people deserve the same healthy opportunities in life that my son has. It’s important that state leaders’ step in and do the right thing, for too long has the tobacco industry corrupted young people’s bodies for their own benefit.”

So, I am not surprised to hear that 1 in 4 Maine high school students are partaking in e-cigarettes. Teachers from schools across Maine have been more than willing to support this campaign’s effort to end the sale of flavored tobacco products. I have reached out to over 300 teachers across the state of Maine. Principals, Math teachers, Science teachers, Social studies teachers, English teachers, Guidance Counselors, Athletic Directors, Health & PE teachers all agree that these products have to go. I have a few quotes from teachers that I would like to share:

Justin Giroux, a Science teacher from Waterville High School highlighted, “The addiction of e-cigarettes seems to have increased dramatically over the course of my teaching career. Flavored tobacco products were made plain and simple to hook our youth, so they continue to be addicts in adulthood.”

Chad M. Bell, Principal at Winslow High School wrote, “Flavored tobacco encourages young students to try harmful tobacco/nicotine/menthol products. Once hooked it can lead to a lifetime of addiction to these deadly products.”

Laurel E Hanson, English teacher at Messalonskee High School states, “Blatant packaging and marketing of clearly unhealthy products to children and young adults is unethical; some things are simply understood to be unacceptable. Since companies with monetary interests that outweigh human interests are unable to make those determinations independently, laws need to be passed to help guide them.”

Through this campaign, I have realized that the people of Maine genuinely believe this is the right thing to do. Thank you for your time.

King Regards,

Justin Grillo

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