

## **Testimony in favor of LD 1550, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services; thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify in support of LD 1550, An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

My name is Deborah Hagler. I'm a parent, pediatrician, President of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and a resident of Harpswell. I'd like to focus my comments on vaping, which has become the most popular method of tobacco use by youth, and a public health epidemic. Flavored tobacco products have decreased perceptions of harm and enticed youth to begin e cigarette use, leading to rapid addiction, when ordinary cigarettes never would have. Why are these electronic devices particularly dangerous, you might ask?

- 1) Addiction to nicotine. The teen brain is particularly vulnerable. The combination of the potency of some of the nicotine products and the teen brain can lead to nicotine dependence in a matter of days or weeks with even occasional vaping.
- 2) The aerosol inhaled into the lungs contains at least 6 groups of toxic chemicals including nicotine, volatile organic compounds such as benzene, particulate matter, and trace metal elements among others (carbonyls, bacterial endotoxins). Most of these chemicals cause inflammation and lung damage and can exacerbate underlying lung diseases such as asthma.
- 3) A serious acute lung injury known as EVALI, e cigarette or vaping-product associated lung injury, is not fully understood but is likely a chemical injury and can lead to hospitalization and even death in previously healthy individuals—many of them young.

**Of particular concern from a public health standpoint is the rapid and widespread uptake of e cigarettes in the adolescent population.**

- An 80% increase in uptake within a year in 2017, with 1 in 5 high school students reporting use is unprecedented. A new generation of individuals is quickly becoming addicted to nicotine. Youth who use e cigarettes have 3-4 times the odds of transitioning to traditional combustible cigarettes.
- With legalization of recreational marijuana and liquid THC, and access to devices that allow for use of both e liquids and marijuana in over 15,000 appealing flavors, it is urgent that we start addressing this now.

Those of us on the front line of caring for youth in this state and across the nation cannot keep up with the problem. I work with many adolescents that have developed an addiction to tobacco products and are struggling to quit. Treatment availability is currently lacking for youth – I'm working on statewide a statewide effort to educate clinicians about proven cessation tools for youth. There is no teen I talk to that does not know someone who vapes at his or her school and I have youth who have reported vaping during class. The term "nic sick" is part of the urban dictionary now for a light-headed or sick-to-your-stomach feeling that one gets after vaping a product with a high concentration of nicotine.

- Youth uptake is happening much more rapidly than we are able to study the many and increasingly concerning health effects.

- Alluring flavors additionally serve to reduce the perception of harm associated with the use of a dangerous chemical.
- Pediatricians have had little or no training in the treatment of nicotine addiction and we are working to catch-up.
- The devices are continuing to evolve and now allow for refilling of concentrated liquid nicotine and liquid THC (the psychoactive component of marijuana), often in combination with a flavor additive. We don't know all the ingredients contained in these liquids and what new chemicals can be produced when mixed together.

Banning flavors and restricting marketing of these products is a strong and necessary step to protect the health of Maine youth. It is our responsibility to protect our children from known dangers. This is a real and present threat to the health of a generation of young people who, because of the allure of fun and colorful flavored products, will become addicted to tobacco and nicotine for years to come. Many will suffer for the rest of their lives because of these dangerous products designed to appeal to youth.

We have the power to change this trajectory RIGHT NOW. I implore you to think of the young people you know and love. We must help them not fall into the trap of addiction. Vote to ban flavors today.