



Testimony of Helen Hemminger

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Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

LD 1550

An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

May 7, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Helen Hemminger, and I am offering testimony on behalf of the Maine Children's Alliance. Our organization is a public policy, nonprofit improving the lives of Maine children, youth and families through research, collaboration, and advocacy. For over 25 years, MCA has promoted sound policies and best practices to make sure all Maine children have the resources and opportunity to reach their full potential from birth to adulthood.

Maine Children's Alliance urges your support of LD 1550 to end the sale of flavored tobacco products for all electronic smoking devices such as a JUUL or similar disposable vaping devices. According to the manufacturer, a single JUUL pod contains as much nicotine as a pack of 20 regular cigarettes. We need to act now to prevent an entire generation from becoming addicted to nicotine.

While it is true that federal legislation removed flavors other than tobacco and menthol from the electronic vaping market as of February 2020, there was a giant loophole. The law made no restrictions on having flavors in *disposable* e-cigarettes. These smaller disposable products are similar in appearance to the original JUUL, but are pre-charged, cheaper (some for less than \$5), and available in flavors, like strawberry, watermelon, cotton candy, and mint. These have the same or higher nicotine concentrations as the products that were on the market before the ban. Our youth switched to the new disposable products, and use of the disposable products increased by 1,000% from 2019 to 2020.

<https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0407.pdf>

In the 2021 Maine KIDS COUNT Data Book, that we produce at Maine Children's Alliance, we note that vaping nicotine products are highly addictive, can harm the developing adolescent brain, and can increase risk for future addiction to other drugs. In addition, youth who use tobacco are more likely to develop major health problems including lung cancer. In 2019, according to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), nearly one third of Maine's high school students reported e-cigarette use. Among Maine high school students who have vaped, over 80 percent reported using flavored e-cigarettes. Alarming, 56 percent said there was no nicotine in their electronic vapor product the last time they vaped, yet we know that 91 percent of e-cigarette liquid on the market in the United States contains nicotine. So, about a third of Maine students who vape flavored products were not even aware that vaping nicotine is liable to addict them quite quickly. (Maine CDC)

I also write to you as a parent. My own son vaped in high school. I was not aware of it, as the products look like flash drives and are easily concealed in a backpack. More than six months went past before I found a vaping device in the driver side door pocket of our car after he got his driver's license. When confronted, my son admitted he was not aware that the mango-flavored pod he had used contained tobacco.

It is our responsibility as adults to protect children from the addictive, long-term health consequences of flavored tobacco products. Parents need your help. To safeguard the future health of Maine children, we urge your support of LD 1550 to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products in Maine.

Thank you for your consideration.

Helen Hemminger

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