

LD 1550: An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

Testimony of Joanne Joy

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May 7, 2021

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

Why do I care about flavors – because I want a fighting chance for all youth and in particular for the youth of my community– the LGBTQ+ youth and young adults - to be all they can be.

I have worked in prevention for over 25 years, first in HIV prevention, switching to tobacco in 2001. I was naïve to both big tobacco’s manipulations to hook vulnerable people, and higher rates of smoking among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. For over 20 years, more people with HIV died from a tobacco related disease than from HIV. I spent years asking for resources tailored to LGBTQ+ people – requests largely met with blank stares.

Big tobacco has targeted populations who experience minority stress, discrimination, stigma and other systemic harms. We have the opportunity to address these disparities – in this legislative session. Ending flavors is one clear step to reduce big tobacco’s negative impact on our vulnerable populations.

In the past year, Maine CDC launched a LGBTQ+ tobacco initiative with community partners. The LGBTQ+ Youth Tobacco Prevention Project is a shared project between my organization and OUT Maine – the only statewide organization supporting LGBTQ+ youth. I’ve learned a lot more.

About 20% of high school students in Maine identify as LGBTQ+ and unsure. Menthol is a flavor that youth frequently start with – about 7% of all youth smoke – over 13% of LGBTQ+ youth do.

Maine HS Students and Tobacco-2019 MIYHS High School Detailed Report at https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/2019_reports_results

	Smoked at least 1 day: past 30 days	Started before age 13: Of those who smoked: past 30 days	Used chew, snuff, dip, etc. at least 1 day: past 30 days (not vaping)	Smoked cigars, cigarillos, little cigars at least 1 day: past 30 days	In same room with someone smoking: past 7 days	In same car with someone smoking: past 7 days
All Maine HS Students	7.1%	32.6%	4.5%	5.7%	27.0%	19.6%
Gay/Lesbian	12.5%	36.9%	7.6%	9.4%	35.4%	26.1%
Bisexual	12.9%	32.3%	3.7%	5.9%	39.5%	30.4%
Not Sure SO	11.1%	55.2%	8.7%	10.0%	30.3%	22.1%
Transgender	20.3%	61.1%	11.8%	14.5%	41.5%	32.6%
Not Sure GI	20.1%	57.1%	14.3%	16.8%	44.5%	37.2%

Flavors make beginning to smoke or vape much easier

For students it's been tough staying connected to school this year. This is a story from a local High School teacher – she had been working with a LGBTQ+ youth to overcome the bullying, the isolation, the discrimination, and the lack of support from his family, but the addiction to tobacco was more than he could deal with – he was caught vaping and suspended for two weeks – this may have been the end of school for him – because he had been targeted by tobacco, and he's addicted. Youth are the replacement market for others who have quit – or died young - because if kids get to be 21, they are way, way less likely to ever start. We need to do everything in our power to help all kids stay tobacco free.

LGBTQ+ youth are already struggling to be all they can be – ending flavored tobacco products will help them not start – and help other's quit. With tobacco companies targeting the most vulnerable among our youth, it's important that we do all we can to make tobacco use less easy to begin.

Please vote yes on LD 1550

Thank you for listening. I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

I also want to read a few lines from two others who could not be here today:\