

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

My mother smoked as a 20-something year old and my father chewed tobacco, smoked a pipe, and still occasionally smokes a cigar. He stopped chewing tobacco when he found little white bumps on his gums where he placed his menthol flavored tobacco packets.

I used to steal his menthol chewing tobacco out of the freezer for the fun of it to “be like my Dad”. In the 80’s, my high school had what we called a “butt hut” and with parents’ permission students could smoke right on campus.

Tobacco companies have made it cool to smoke for decades. Generations of rural Mainers have grown up smoking and thinking it is all okay. Now we have vapes and flavors, a whole new generation of kids addicted to tobacco. Big tobacco companies have convinced some people with their millions of dollars in marketing that it is cool to JUUL, that it is safe to vape essentially.

Now, as a tobacco prevention educator, I offer ENDS (electronic nicotine delivery systems) workshops to students in our rural and marginalized communities in Washington County.

When over 80% of students in every class that I teach raise their hands to tell me that they smoke, they ‘ve tried it, their older siblings vape, and their parents are smoking more now than they were before since they have switched to vaping, clearly there is an enormous problem! 85% of kids who TRY a vape try it because of FLAVORS.

Teachers are confiscating hundreds of vapes. Students are vaping in bathrooms, backs of the classroom, in the hallways, in the gym. Students are skipping school to vape.

We have not had a chance to educate parents and students about the immediate dangers and long term consequences of these devices on their bodies, minds, and overall health. Principals do not know what to do. They really DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO. The problem has taken off so quickly in schools that principals are at a loss of how to cope with this. It is a pandemic among youth.

Parents do not realize how these are NICOTINE delivering devices, a way more modern and slick device that delivers the same (or worse) toxic chemicals and nicotine as a regular combustible cigarette. This is so scary it gives me goosebumps every time I am able to educate someone about the dangers we know and short and long-term consequences of vapes. A

student at a school in Washington county shared with me that their cousins in Aroostook county were sharing a vape and all of them caught mononucleosis and were sick for over a month.

I have offered workshops to youth ranging from ages of 7 to 18. Why seven years of age? They watch TikTok and see all of the colorful ads and exciting flavors like Unicorn Milk and Bubble Gum clearly one of 15,500 flavors that grab the attention of a very young person. Their parents and childcare providers are afraid for their futures. Kids compete to see HOW FAST they can consume the juice in one pod, the equivalent of 1 pack of cigarettes. They have competitions and then video record this. They can consume one pack IN SECONDS. With regular cigarettes that is not humanly possible but with vapes it sure is!

Legislators, I support Bill 1550 to ban the sale of flavored tobacco and menthol. Maine has THE highest rate of smokers in the country and rural Maine like Washington County where I grew up and now live, work and play has the highest rates and research shows that these tobacco companies TARGET RURAL POOR communities. Please support this too for the health of generations of Mainers this is a really important step.

Please Ban Flavored Tobacco and Menthol Sales in Maine

Georgie Kendall
Perry Maine
Kendall Farm Cottages & Event Barn, a 5th generation lakeside farmstead on Boyden Lake
207 214 1124
georgiekendall@gmail.com