

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and the esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Dee Kerry. I am the Executive Director of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and a resident of Portland. I'm speaking in favor of LD 1550.

I'll be sharing a few thoughts with you today, as well as reading testimony excerpts from two providers who couldn't be here to testify in person today.

I'd like to share that this bill is very important to me personally. I lost my grandmother to emphysema, watched my father suffer from esophageal cancer – both caused by decades of tobacco use that started at a young age.

The Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics has made it a priority to work on reducing youth tobacco use.

Youth, along with people of color and other marginalized populations are targeted by the tobacco industry. With over 15,000 flavors, particularly menthol, smoking and vaping are irresistibly appealing to young people and easier to use and tolerate than traditional tobacco products.

As you have heard, the use of electronic cigarettes in particular, deliver a high concentration of nicotine which creates dependence and addiction. The dangers of which have been described by some of the pediatric providers who've testified before me.

Our pediatrician members are -being trained in motivational interviewing, a technique that helps them to have meaningful, non-judgmental conversations with youth around their use of nicotine, - learning about effective cessation tools to help people quit and - working with organizations such as the Center for Tobacco Independence, Breathe Free Maine and the Public Health Association to provide programs for parents and youth in the community on the dangers of smoking and vaping.

Yet with all of this work, we still have an uphill battle on our hands due to the widespread use and high rate of addiction caused by these colorful, appealing, flavored tobacco products.

I hope you will really take the testimony of the medical community, schools, public health experts, young people and community members to heart today. This is a serious problem that is getting worse every day. Addiction is so pervasive in our community. We need more than education to combat this epidemic – we need regulation around the masking of dangerous toxic nicotine products marketed to our youth and the vulnerable among us.

Dr. Perry Bassett – an ER physician from Calais shares he recently had a patient come into the emergency room with an elevated heart rate and extreme anxiety and agitation – after testing came back normal, conversations led to the youth admitting to vaping over a one Juul pod per day – the equivalent of a pack of cigarettes. This was a good story – we were able to give him education and cessation tools. Not all youth are so lucky. Others have had very bad outcomes, even death.

Karen Davis – a family nurse practitioner in Houlton shares she has worked in primary care and in the emergency department and has seen first hand the seriousness of addiction. She's had people tell her that heroin addiction was easier to overcome than nicotine addiction. She has seen many illnesses related to vaping – one 17 year old in particular who was really suffering and had horrible pneumonia that was not responsive to antibiotics - he had to be transported to Bangor for more advanced treatment. She's seen COPD, cancer and other conditions related to tobacco use over the years – but nothing like the stream of youth coming in with serious lung conditions related to vaping.

They join me in asking that you please help this and future generations by banning flavored products that keep youth using these dangerous products. Thank you.