



May 7, 2021

Dear Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services,

Thank you for your service in the Legislature, especially in light of the continuing effects of the Pandemic upon our residents. It has truly laid bare the inequities and lack of access to essential programs and services in our rural area. No where do we see this more demonstrated than in the health and wellbeing of our children and adults, many of whom lacked healthcare prior to the Pandemic and entered into this moment with existing health conditions including addiction, mental health concerns and chronic health issues.

I am writing as a public health professional in support of LD 1550, “An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products” Tobacco addiction is a pediatric epidemic.

We have a serious problem here – not only in Piscataquis County, but also throughout our state. According to the 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, there was a near doubling in youth e-cigarette use since 2017 (28.7% vs. 15.3%), with some of the greatest increases seen here - in Piscataquis (26.6% vs. 6.7%) and in Oxford (30.9% vs. 12.3%) counties. Given the fact that two of our school districts didn’t participate in the 2019 MYIHS, these figures for Piscataquis County are indeed low compared to actual use.

As the tobacco industry is refines their campaign to create “replacement smokers” and targeted our youth and young adults specifically – some as young as third grade. Tobacco companies have developed an array of more than 15,000 candy- and fruit-flavored products in colorful packaging to attract youth and mask the harsh taste of tobacco.

We know that if youth don’t start using tobacco before the age of 21, they are unlikely to ever do so.

The tobacco industry has targeted people who are have behavioral and mental health disorders, LGBTQ+, and Black and Brown communities. In my region, their targeting reaches out directly to persons in poverty. They target them through lower prices, increased retail density, social connection, and product promotions.

LD 1550 is good public health, economic and social policy and ending the sale of flavored tobacco products is a matter of health equity and social justice. Please support this important legislation.

Than you again for your service and for caring about our people. We need to act today.

My best,

Susan D. Mackey Andrews
3 Shore Road North
Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426
207-564-7835