



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: Maine Relay 711

Michele Meyer

58 Odiorne Lane

Eliot, ME 03903

Phone: (207) 438-9197

Michele.Meyer@legislature.maine.gov

May 7, 2021

Testimony of Rep. Michele Meyer presenting

1550, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Claxton and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Rep. Michele Meyer, in service to the people of Southern Maine's House District 2, Eliot and parts of Kittery and South Berwick. I am pleased to introduce **LD 1550, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products**.

I have spent my professional career as a registered nurse. I have had the distinct honor of providing care to others across the lifespan - from the delivery room and the miracle of childbirth to the final hours of a life sometimes long lived but too often, sadly, ravaged by disease and taken too soon. While it may seem a cliché, I chose the caring profession because, quite simply, I was drawn to helping and making a difference in the lives of others. I see my role as a policymaker as a direct extension of my nursing practice. The 13 of us on this Committee have the ability to impact the health and wellbeing of every Mainer - our older citizens, the families, the children - not just today but for generations to come. And there may be few other bills we have considered together that have the potential to make such a significant impact on the health of Maine kids and communities.

Tobacco use puts our children's health and futures at risk. It's an addiction that begins in adolescence, and too often ends in early death. Smoking kills more people than any other preventable illness, and it causes chronic disease and disability, harming nearly every organ of the body. At the root of all this is nicotine addiction.

Nicotine addiction is really only possible in young, developing brains. If you have not started smoking by age 26, it is unlikely you will ever do so. The tobacco industry knows this, of course, and has spent decades marketing products specifically designed to lure and hook youth and young adults.

That's where it's beginning, with the majority of smokers starting in their in their teens, and most of them with flavored tobacco products like menthol, mint, candy and dessert flavors – all making it

easier for kids to give cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and now e-cigarettes or vaping a try. There are thousands of these flavored products, and 80% of kids who use tobacco start with a flavored product.

The tobacco industry is ruthless and predatory. They are willing to do and say anything to preserve their ability to manufacture, market and sell deadly products with few limitations – products designed to lure kids into addiction. As a legislator and House chair of this committee, I see the alarming rise of tobacco use among Maine’s children as a policy failure. By allowing tobacco companies to continue to peddle flavored products in our state, we are setting up our children and grandchildren to experience adverse health outcomes and years of addiction.

So, the most important thing for us to remember, because it makes it easy to see where to apply public policy, is that without youth and young adult tobacco use, there would be virtually no tobacco-related disease and early death. That means longer, more productive lives, and it means big reductions in health care costs.

Like most every other area of policy of particular importance to me, this legislation is also personal. Tobacco’s youth recruitment efforts were trained on my own child.

Do you know tobacco manufacturers have aggressively targeted certain communities with their menthol products? People of color, LGBTQ people. My son fell into both categories. His was often the only beautiful little brown face in a classroom of beautiful white little faces, and coming to terms with his sexual orientation was challenging. There was never any shortage of those who would remind him he was different. The tobacco industry convinced kids like mine that smoking was a means to acceptance. It convinced that young person struggling with the development of his identity that being a cool, confident gay guy of color started with a pack of menthol cigarettes.

And while his smoking career was thankfully short lived, the same cannot be said for the 95% of adult smokers who started before the age of 21.

There are many behind me waiting to provide testimony on LD 1550. You will hear from advocates, experts and fellow Mainers who want you to know their nicotine addiction might have been avoided had they not been enticed as kids and young adults to start smoking or vaping sweet, minty and menthol products that made smoking so easy to start and that lead to a dependence on a substance that robs those addicted of full, healthy lives.

You’ll hear too from those carrying the message of the tobacco industry. An industry skilled in scare tactics and falsehoods. An industry that preys on our kids.

Last week, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that it will be issuing tobacco product standards within the next year to ban menthol flavored cigarettes and all flavored cigars. Armed with strong scientific evidence the FDA believes these actions will launch our country on a trajectory toward ending tobacco-related disease and death in the U.S.

This is an important step forward, but FDA action often takes years to go into effect. We have an opportunity here in Maine to take swift action to protect Maine's children from developing nicotine addictions through the use of flavored tobacco products, [LD 1550](#), that would prohibit the sale and distribution of all flavored tobacco products, flavored e-cigarettes and cigars.

LD 1550 is a game changer for every child tempted by sweet, minty flavors and quickly caught up in a lifetime of addiction. We have an opportunity here to change the trajectory of young lives, to push back on an industry long preying on our kids, to use the unique honor of our service to this state to advance policy out of this committee that will literally save lives across the lifespan and for generations to come. Healthy kids are ready to learn, healthy workers are more productive on the job, and healthy older adults are able to remain independent in their own home, enjoying their years active and involved in life

Let's stop this cycle of addiction, of chronic illness, of untimely death. Let's stand up to tobacco industry deception and ruthless targeting of our kids. Let's end the sale of all flavored tobacco products. Let's do what we were sent here to do: to improve the lives of Mainers and to protect the health and future of our children.