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Testimony of Rep. Rebecca Millett in support of
LD 1550, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good morning Senator Claxton, Rep. Meyer and esteemed members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Rebecca Millett and I represent House District 30 which is most of Cape Elizabeth. I am honored to testify in support of **LD 1550, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.**

Since I first came before this committee with legislation to address the scourge of vaping and flavored tobacco, the news has not improved. One out of four of Maine's high school students now use e-cigarettes - double what it was just two years ago.¹ Maine high school students aren't the only young people using e-cigarettes and vaping products, however. Middle school students and even some elementary students are as well.

Young people are often unaware of the health dangers that can be caused by chemicals in e-cigarettes and vaping products. A recent study found that an astounding 63 percent of 15 to 24-year-olds who used the product, Juul, didn't know that it contains nicotine, even though one Juul pod is equivalent to smoking about a whole pack of cigarettes.

Nor did they know that nicotine delivered via e-cigarettes is more readily absorbed into the bloodstream. Nicotine is highly addictive, and adolescents are especially susceptible because their developing prefrontal cortexes make them "uniquely vulnerable to addiction," the president of the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco told the New York Times in December. Nicotine also can exacerbate underlying mental health conditions and lead to hyperactivity, depression and anxiety, the same article reported.

Many kids have no idea that the flavorings in these products, which often have insufficient labeling, can contain harmful substances, including lead, formaldehyde, acrolein, and diacetyl,

¹ Maine Department of Health & Human Services & Maine Department of Education, "Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey", 2019.
https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/files/2019_Reports/Detailed_Reports/HS/MIYHS2019_Detailed_Reports_HS_State/Maine_High_School_Detailed_Tables.pdf.

the chemical blamed for causing “popcorn lung, according to a study last year by the Harvard School of Public Health.

And the adults don’t know either. Students have shared with me that parents are supplying their kids with e-cigarettes often because the withdrawal from e-cigarettes is so terrible.

Flavored tobacco products use enticing flavors, colorful packaging and lower prices to hook a new generation of tobacco users. Sweet flavors like watermelon, cherry, chocolate, mint and gummy bear appeal to kids and teens. Flavorings mask the harsh taste of tobacco which makes it easier for youth to initiate tobacco use. The U.S. Surgeon General has warned that flavored tobacco products help new users establish habits that can lead to long-term addiction. Most smokers begin their lifetime addiction before 18 and the majority begin with flavored products. Flavors like menthol in tobacco products make it harder for users to quit.

The FDA also has more than enough evidence to ban the sale of menthol cigarettes. As today’s filing noted, youth and young adult smokers are much more likely to smoke menthol than non-menthol cigarettes, as compared to older adult smokers. A comprehensive FDA report on menthol cigarettes, issued in 2013, concluded that menthol cigarettes lead to 1) increased smoking initiation among youth and young adults; 2) greater addiction; and 3) decreased success in quitting smoking. “These findings, combined with the evidence indicating that menthol’s cooling and anesthetic properties can reduce the harshness of cigarette smoke and the evidence indicating that menthol cigarettes are marketed as a smoother alternative to nonmenthol cigarettes, make it likely that menthol cigarettes pose a public health risk above that seen with nonmenthol cigarettes,” the FDA’s report concluded. (Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, 3/20/18)

Simply, flavors are about making the consumption of tobacco more pleasant, encourage consumption and provide the gateway for a lifetime habit. Period. It’s about profit. Huge profit at the expense of our citizenry’s health.

There are some Maine businesses who are concerned about the loss of sales and point to laws that limit the age of purchasers, but we all know it’s not working. I’m confident that they don’t want to be a part of any effort to hook our kids on nicotine and rather be a part of our communities’ efforts to reduce this public health threat. I hope you agree that these flavored products are a threat to our children’s health, their health as adults and to the overall public health of Maine. Please join me in supporting LD 1550.