

*LD 1550: An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products*

- *Testimony of Laura Morris, Director of Be the Influence Coalition and resident in Cumberland County, Portland, ME*

*To: Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Laura Morris, I live in Portland, and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1550, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.*

As an Executive Director of a Drug Free Community grant, I have been in youth drug prevention for over 25 years and have sadly seen directly the direct negative effects tobacco and now vaping products have had on our youth. It took us over 50 years for the general public to understand the long term tragic consequences of tobacco use and it should come as no surprise that ecigs and the many new flavors, colors and enticing devices are targeted to youth and have increased use in teens tremendously over the years. In the RSU14 school district (according to the Maine Integrated Youth Survey), 25% of youth report 30 day use of the products and start as young as 12.5. Youth focus groups and school officials report a far higher number and School Resource Officers report confiscating up to 12-20 devices in a week pre-covid. Many youth struggle going safely to the bathroom as many are vaping in the stalls. Devices are cleverly hid from view during class and throughout the day in the many products (sweatshirts, bras, Coke cans. Etc.) designed to entice youth from this industry. Youth are bombarded on the internet and social media with ads, mis information and marketing practices that directly hook teens with false information. The main cause of youth use is the tremendous amount of flavors being offered (15,000). Bubble gum and mango are hardly flavors relating to an older population. Hundreds of toxins above and beyond nicotine are harming the underdeveloped brains and lungs of this industry's clientele. If they get youth to use before the age of 21, they have twice the chance of addicting a life long customer. Youth are sucking these products down (One Juul equaling the same amount of nicotine in a pack of cigarettes and a Puff even more) and are reporting anxiety and fear when they are unable to function without needing to vape throughout the day. LPersonally, I fear for my own son, who believed that vaping THC was healthier than vaping Nicotine and has suffered many healthy repercussions Let us not be duped again! You have a wonderful opportunity to be part of the solution and to keep our youth safe from huge industries that target them and have no concern for the horrific effects their products have on them. Please vote to ban ALL flavors, including menthol and stop this industry's ability to ruin the lives of the many youth of the future.

I am adamantly urging you to vote yes on LD1550.

Maine's future depends on healthy kids, but flavored tobacco products are luring and hooking another generation. It's time to end the sale of flavored tobacco. It is our moral and honest responsibility. Thank you for your time.