

LD1550 An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

Testimony of Lisa Sockabasin, Passamaquoddy, Greene, Maine

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Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Lisa Sockabasin, I am a citizen of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Motahkomikuk, I have many years' experience working on issues of health equity and justice. I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1550, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

The Wabanaki communities in Maine care deeply about the health and wellbeing of all people. We carry deep responsibility to our Wabanaki youth and to future generations. For decades, Wabanaki people have been recipients of disproportional targeting from a variety of sectors. Whether it be government, health care, education, or industry- each sector displays their beliefs on the value of indigenous, black, and brown lives by either focusing on our communities too much or by simply making our communities invisible. Often our communities become customers of those behaviors that are known to be detrimental and resources to address the detrimental impacts do not follow the people that are most impacted. Our society, our state, should be troubled by the continued use of targeted advertising to attract young people, and especially young people in marginalized communities, to begin smoking at ages that become younger with each passing year.

Commercial tobacco companies have developed an array of menthol, candy, and dessert-flavored products in colorful packaging to attract new users and addict them to tobacco. The commercial tobacco industry does not intend for these flavors to create new adult users. They are targeting children, they are targeting children who are already marginalized by our society and systems, they are targeting indigenous children whose sacred medicines include the tobacco plant, and it is working.

I will not provide exhaustive statistics today; it is well documented that commercial tobacco steals the lives of indigenous, black, and brown people disproportionately. We know that brain development is not complete until age 26, and young adults are more susceptible to addictive behaviors. Nicotine exposure during adolescence and young adulthood can cause addiction and long-term harm to brain development. In our Wabanaki communities, this fact is exacerbated by additional environmental factors like lowered life expectancy, generational trauma, poverty, increased risk of disease, and lack of tribal sovereignty. This complex combination has created a crisis for the health of our children and our future generations.

Our children won't win against the commercial tobacco industry. Our Wabanaki people won't win against the commercial tobacco industry. We need your help. We share this challenge to overcome. This is not for our children to solve in the future, or our future generations to solve. This is our problem, the future generations will have different challenges to contend with, let's not leave them with ours. It is our collective responsibility to care for all people in Maine. The Wabanaki people need your help. The State of Maine needs your help. Help us start to heal from the generations of exploitation by the commercial tobacco industry.

Please vote 'yes' on LD 1550. Kci Woliwon (Thank you) for your time.