

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

Testimony of Nyle Sockbeson, Indian Island/Maine

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Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Nyle Sockbeson, I am a proud member of the Penobscot Nation and I reside on Indian Island, Maine. I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1550, An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

I am lucky enough to be able to work with our incredible tribal youth here on Indian Island. My professional title is the Penobscot Youth Engagement Educator, and I am employed by Wabanaki Public Health and Wellness. I believe that a healthier future starts with empowering youth and ending the sale of flavored tobacco products.

I would like to share my story of how I became addicted to commercial tobacco through flavored products. I hope my story will serve as one of the many examples as to why flavored tobacco products are dangerous, especially to kids.

I was fourteen years old when I first used smokeless tobacco or "dip". It first became accessible and more desirable when the older, cooler, and more skilled players on my high school hockey team were using dip. One day, I asked one of my teammates if I could have a pinch of his flavorless can of dip. Like many people who first try smokeless tobacco, I proceeded to feel nauseous, throw up and develop a headache. At the time, I did not have any desire to try this product again.

A few months later, the same teammate offered me a pinch of grape flavored dip. Succumbing to the peer pressure, and ignoring my past experience, I accepted his offer and enjoyed the flavored dip very much. So much, that this pinch of grape dip led to a near ten-year struggle with smokeless tobacco addiction. These flavored tobacco products appeared inviting and harmless to my fourteen-year-old self. The taste was immensely more enjoyable than the flavorless dip I had previously tried.

Today, I am nearly two years free of smokeless tobacco use. It took me years to quit, and I was lucky enough to have the support and education from my mother, a dental hygienist. She noticed my mouth deteriorate over the years, and helped me tremendously in the difficult process of quitting.

I am one, of the four, out of five kids, to become addicted to commercial tobacco through flavored products. My addiction was smokeless tobacco, but the same storyline is seen with youth using cigarettes and e-cigarettes. Especially, when these products are designed and flavored to be appealing and addictive to youth. Flavored tobacco products need to be inaccessible to kids and the sale of these products need to end. Please vote yes on LD 1550.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today, I will now answer any questions.