

Written Testimony Template FLAVOR BAN

Dear [LEGISLATOR],

My name is Alpesh Patel, I writing to you as a resident and small business operator in Westbrook/Maine. My business operates across southern Maine and employs 7 Maine residents. I am disappointed to hear that the Maine State Legislature is considering a ban on menthol cigarettes, flavored dip, and flavored cigars across the state. I urge you to oppose this measure.

We agree we need to address underage vaping, but banning all flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, makes no sense.

Maine's small business owners have struggled to keep their doors open during this prolonged economic slowdown. Not only have gas and in-store sales been impacted, but I've also had to invest in additional safety measures resulting in unforeseen costs negatively impacting my bottom line.

This broad ban on flavored tobacco products would jeopardize a significant portion of my revenue and quite frankly, could force my business to close its doors. A ban on these products would put thousands of Maine jobs at risk.

I urge you to vote against L.D.1550. Please do not move forward with such a broad ban.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Alpesh Patel



Talking Points to Consider

Current environment:

- We have experienced firsthand the extreme measures it takes to operate in the current environment and recognize the overwhelming challenges our communities face during these trying times.
- We are an essential business and have played an important role in taking care of our community.
- Legislators should focus on more important things during an economic crisis than compounding the economic hardship convenience store operators are currently facing.
- Every day is a test of our ability to stay open. We will be ok, but only if you don't hurt us while we are down.

- Now more than ever, I'm looking to our lawmakers to make the right decisions to help small businesses get back on their feet.
- We have worked diligently to remain open and stocked with essential items as well as to support our employees and customers.
- This proposal will do irreversible harm to Maine's small businesses at a time when they are most vulnerable.

Flavor ban:

- A ban on flavored tobacco products targets a significant portion of our revenue. Menthol cigarettes account for nearly 18% of all cigarette sales in Maine. For moist smokeless tobacco, flavored products are nearly 87% of sales in our state.
- A ban on flavored tobacco products would cause great harm to our business. Adult customers who purchase flavored tobacco products also purchase gas, food, and other items that our store depends on.
- We agree we need to address underage vaping. We support FDA restrictions on flavored vapor products. The ban on all flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, makes no sense. It will multiply the existing illegal market in Maine, reward criminal smugglers, and cost Maine businesses, workers, and taxpayers billions of dollars.
- Retailers are the first line of defense when it comes to preventing kids from purchasing tobacco products. We take this responsibility very seriously.
- We pay taxes, create jobs, and support the local economy. This ban would not only hurt our business, but it could also have devastating effects in our community.
- Don't use the youth vaping epidemic to cause many other problems with a ban on traditional tobacco products, such as increased crime and illegal activity in our communities.
- Banning flavored tobacco products – including menthol cigarettes – won't end the sale of these products in Maine. It will simply mean criminal networks – already smuggling and dealing illicit products to Maine – will feed the demand, and continue to do so without paying taxes, without checking ID, and without following any other rules or regulations.
- Banning the sale of flavored tobacco products to adults, including menthol cigarettes, would put **\$21.8 million in revenues at risk – that's more than \$180.8 million over ten years**. The impact on state programs that benefit from cigarette excise tax revenue could be disruptive. At risk are:
 - **Nearly \$22 million** in excise tax revenues from cigarettes