

# Maine Chapter

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American Academy of Pediatrics

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February 4, 2022

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Joe Anderson. I am a resident of Portland, a hospital-based pediatrician in Lewiston, and I sit on the Board of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. I am pleased to testify in favor of LD 1693: "An Act to Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust." There are several important components to this bill, but I want to focus on two that I believe will have a great impact on improving the health of those living in our great state.

### Establishment of the Office of Health Equity

We all want people who live in Maine to have a fair and just opportunity to be healthy. To make that ideal a reality, we need to actively work to remove obstacles to health across all sectors of society. Health disparities exist because of numerous factors: poverty and a lack of access to good jobs; discrimination toward marginalized groups; lack of access to quality education, housing, and safe environments; and inequities related to delivering health care access across a large and geographically diverse state. This bill establishes the Office of Health Equity and tasks it with addressing these challenges and is a great step toward achieving health equity for all.

### Tobacco Prevention and Control

This bill restructures the state's tobacco settlement fund into the Trust for a Healthy Maine. The trust would be governed by a diverse, non-partisan board with broad experience and expertise in a variety of areas including public health, youth tobacco use, maternal & child health, rural primary care, and social determinants of health, among others. The bill ensures full funding for Maine's tobacco prevention and control program, and ensures the trust is used for this purpose and for other disease prevention efforts and the promotion of public health.

The bill also takes two major steps toward combatting tobacco use and addiction among Maine's youth, first by ending the sale of all flavored tobacco products, and by increasing the cigarette excise tax by \$2.00 per pack. As an ex-smoker of 15 years who became hooked as a teenager smoking flavored cigarettes, I can personally attest to how enticing flavored tobacco products can be to young adolescents, often leading to long-term use and addiction. Research has shown that raising cigarette prices through increased taxes is a highly effective measure for reducing smoking among youth.

Today, Maine has the highest rate of smokers in New England, and it's time we made a commitment to change that statistic.

As a pediatrician and a proud Mainer, I'm delighted that you have taken the time to consider a bill that is proactive and thoughtful in its approach to improving the health of Maine's citizens, and I urge you to vote in support of this legislation.

Respectfully,

Joe Anderson, DO