



CITY OF BANGOR

February 4, 2022

Testimony in Support of: LD 1523: An Act to Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Jamie Comstock and I am the Health Promotion Manager at the City of Bangor's Public Health and Community Services Department. I am providing testimony in support of LD 1523.

I come before you after contemplating the collection of bills this session, some looking to expand the reach of the tobacco industry, and some looking to expand the purview of the cannabis industry. On the surface, it may appear as just another legislative session but what makes this one different is the backdrop.

- In 2021 we lost over 636 Mainers to overdose - a 23% increase from 2020 and a 300% increase since 2010 (Drug Overdose Morbidity and Mortality, and Opioid Prescribing Trends in Maine);
- Over 90% of recently surveyed Maine school counselors report increases in depression and anxiety in their schools and well over half of those school families are facing housing and food stressors (Billings 2021);
- The expansion of industries like tobacco, cannabis, and alcohol and complex social problems like houselessness, mental health, food insecurity, and substance use disorder are interrelated and interconnected
- And, finally, our current public health and prevention system is too frail to address these issues.

LD 1523 gives us a chance to strengthen our public health system for the benefit of all Mainers.

It allows for long term planning, beyond a two-year budget cycle. This has been one of the biggest barriers in our work since 2007, making every aspect of program planning difficult, from recruiting and retaining staff to maintaining a reliable and trusted presence within local communities.

LD 1523 guarantees an annual investment in health equity systems and infrastructure, workforce development, training and technical assistance. It allows us a chance to get out ahead, to make data informed decisions, to allow local communities and local partners to address local issues that will have impact.

And, most importantly, it guarantees the first priority for settlement dollars is preventing tobacco use and nicotine addiction in Maine children and adults by funding Maine's tobacco program at U.S. CDC recommended levels. We'll never be able to invest in prevention what the tobacco industry spends here to promote its products, but this is a solid start.

LD 1523 lets the people of Maine know that we are in it for the long haul.

Thank you for your time and attention. We'd be pleased to take any questions.

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References:

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Billings, Randy. "Pandemic fuels rising reports of anxiety and depression among Maine students." Portland Press Herald. December 10, 2021.

<https://www.pressherald.com/2021/12/10/pandemic-fuels-rising-reports-of-anxiety-depression-among-maine-students/>