



CITY OF BANGOR

February 4, 2022

Testimony in Support of: LD 1693: An Act to Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust

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 1693.

LD 1693 could be one of the most important steps our state could take in ensuring the health of Mainers over the long run.

We are facing unprecedented challenges in addressing myriad interrelated social issues that have been both intensified and illuminated by the pandemic.

- 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);
- Municipalities and communities are struggling to address complex social and public health problems like houselessness, mental health, food insecurity, and substance use. These issues are interrelated and interconnected.

And, after years of systematic disinvestment, coupled with a pandemic, our public health and prevention system struggles to address these issues.

LD 1693 gives us a chance to strengthen our public health system for the benefit of all Mainers. It gives us the chance to plan ahead, to be proactive and thoughtful.

In establishing the trust, 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.

It increases the tobacco tax, the most effective strategy we have for reducing tobacco use and provides a mechanism to dedicate and preserve these funds for prevention - and fund Maine's tobacco program at CDC recommended levels.

It prohibits the sale or distribution of flavored tobacco products, which will benefit the nearly half of high school students reported ever having used an electronic vaping product in 2019, especially those who now find themselves with burdensome nicotine addictions and few treatment options.

It provides obesity prevention standards in early care and public schools - our next big epidemic.

And most importantly, it provides opportunities for local residents in local communities to work with local partners to address local issues that will have a local impact and improve health equity and health disparities in their communities.

LD 1693 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:

Drug Overdose Morbidity and Mortality, and Opioid Prescribing Trends in Maine
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<https://www.pressherald.com/2021/12/10/pandemic-fuels-rising-reports-of-anxiety-depression-among-maine-students/>