

Senator Claxton Representative Meyer and Health and Human Services Committees

Support of LD1523, "An Act to Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine"

Dear Senator Claxton and Representatives Meyer,

The American Heart Association (AHA) is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke, whose mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. As part of the mission, we are working towards the tobacco endgame – ending tobacco use and nicotine addiction in the U.S., which we believe is within site; that is why we are supportive of LD1523, "An Act to Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine".

The use of tobacco products remains the nation's number one cause of preventable death. Tobacco use is responsible for nearly 1 in 5 deaths nationwide and in Maine, nearly 1 in 5 adults smoke cigarettes, the highest rate in the Northeast.ⁱ More than one in 15 Maine high school students smoke cigarettes, with a high of 1 in 8 in Washington County.ⁱⁱ In recent years, overall youth tobacco use in Maine has skyrocketed, largely driven by the youth e-cigarette use epidemic. One in 2 Maine high school students and 1 in 6 middle school students have used e-cigarettes.ⁱⁱⁱ Nearly 30 percent of high school students are current users of e-cigarettes, nearly doubling from 15% in 2017.^{iv}

This legislation makes structural changes to the way our state uses its funds from the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (MSA). The Fund for a Healthy Maine has long been the source for MSA dollars to support our state's tobacco control efforts and other much needed public health programs. However, over the last several years the Fund for a Healthy Maine has seen an increasingly large share of its resources allocated to medical initiatives. This has gradually drawn away available funds for the state's tobacco program, and at times left it funded below the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention's recommended funding level of \$15.9 million.

Good health changes everything for families and businesses. Healthy kids are ready to learn, workers are more productive, seniors can stay in their homes, and employers spend less on insurance coverage. Good health makes Maine a place where businesses want to be, where young people want to stay, and where communities can grow and thrive. Threats to health and productivity are unrelenting. In addition to COVID, serious concerns include youth vaping and nicotine addiction, trauma and toxic stress, opioid misuse and other substance use disorders, and diabetes. These put children at risk for a lifetime of poor health and leave employers struggling to maintain a healthy workforce. The Fund for a Healthy Maine (FHM) budget is no longer sustainable. The tobacco settlement is Maine's primary source of funding for tobacco prevention and public health. But significantly lower payment projections (\$31 million/year) have made the current FHM budget for both public health and medical care (\$55 million) impossible to retain in the next biennium. We can do more to ensure data-driven priority-setting for tobacco settlement dollars. The settlement language is clear that first and foremost, payments should advance policies to reduce youth smoking and promote public health. But the framework for the FHM has become outdated and inflexible, constrained by the 2-year budget cycle. To be resilient and prepared for public health challenges, we need a more planful, nimble system for prioritizing public health investments. It's time to rethink how we address health disparities and make best use of Maine's tobacco settlement. Creating the Trust for a Healthy Maine is about Maine kids and communities. Restructuring the tobacco settlement will help build and sustain a modern, cost-effective system of

public health for Maine, where every child can learn and grow, with healthy brains and bodies, in communities that offer hope, connection, and a productive future.

We strongly believe that when it comes to allocating settlement dollars tobacco must come first. Only when Maine's tobacco program is fully funded will we be achieving the intent of the Master Settlement, and only then can the program have the tools it needs to achieve its goals of preventing the use of tobacco by children and young adults, assisting Mainers with quitting, protecting people from the dangers of secondhand smoke, and eliminating tobacco use disparities. The creation of the Trust for a Healthy Maine will ensure the state's tobacco program is fully funded through a combination of MSA dollars, grants, and other sources with its tiered allocation structure. The annual health care costs directly caused by smoking exceed \$800 million dollars and more than \$260 million in Medicaid costs are incurred in Maine yearly^v. In our state 2400 Mainers die each year from tobacco-related illness and 27,000 children alive today are projected to prematurely succumb to such a death.^v Tobacco is taking a tremendous toll on the health and productivity of our children, our families, our small businesses, and our communities. We all recognize the importance of preventing and reducing tobacco-related illness in Maine. I would ask that you vote "Ought to Pass on LD1523 and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Allyson Perron Drag
American Heart Association/ Stroke Association
Government Relations Director

i Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health. BRFSS Prevalence & Trends Data [online]. 2019. [accessed Feb 09, 2021]. URL: <https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/brfssprevalence/>.

ii Maine CDC, 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS), <https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/>.

iii Ibid.

iv Maine CDC, 2017 and 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS), <https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/>

v Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/problem/toll-us/maine>

vi Truth initiative <https://truthinitiative.org/sites/default/files/Truth-Flavors-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

vii US Department of Health and Human Services. [E-cigarette use among youth and young adults: a report of the Surgeon General](#) Cdc-pdf[PDF-8.47 MB]. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2016.