Testimony of Lani Graham, MD, MPH
Freeport, Maine

IN SUPPORT OF LD 1523

An Act To Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine

Presented by **Representative Rebecca Millett**

Before the Health and Human Services Committee: February 4, 2022

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee. My name is Lani Graham.   I am a retired family practice physician and former Chief Public Health officer for Maine.   Currently I serve on the Public Health Committee for the Maine Medical Association (MMA)

I have been involved in public health in Maine for more than 25 years, but over the years I have been discouraged by the difficulty in maintaining consistent funding for public health and particularly for the great epidemic of tobacco addiction. In 2020 the leading killer in Maine was not Covid, but heart disease, followed by cancer, both strongly linked to tobacco use.

We all celebrated when at last the tobacco companies were held accountable for knowingly addicting thousands of Maine people to this dangerous product and through multi-state litigation, Maine became one of the beneficiaries of the Tobacco Settlement dollars.   At the time, the Maine legislature sensibly set up a special receptacle, the Fund for Healthy Maine. Yet over the years, sadly, those dollars have increasingly gone to sick care, rather than prevention.   While this is totally understandable, we are now at a crossroads.   Careful analysis shows that if we do nothing in just three short years, the tobacco program will be "on the ropes".

Rep. Millet's bill has been carefully crafted, learning from the mistakes of other states, to create a plan that can best protect those tobacco settlement dollars from being overwhelmed by the costs of health care or other budgetary needs.

Now is the time to act to create a professional plan that will fully fund the tobacco control program in Maine, align with the work of the Maine Centers for Disease Control and move Maine people toward a healthier future.

I hope this bill will get unanimous support.   Thank you.