



**Partnership for
Children's
Oral Health**

A network to eradicate dental disease in Maine children

Testimony of Kalie Hess, Associate Director

Partnership for Children's Oral Health on LD 1693: An Act to Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Public Hearing: February 4, 2022

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services: My name is Kalie Hess and I am the Associate Director of the Partnership for Children's Oral Health (Partnership). The Partnership is a collaborative effort, funded by philanthropic dollars, to build a broad network of individuals and organizations to create a Maine where all children can grow up free from preventable dental disease. This testimony is in support of LD 1693: An Act to Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust

Oral health equity is foundational to the work we do; inequities drive poor oral health outcomes for children in underserved communities. An equity-focused approach to public health is essential to make meaningful progress on health outcomes, including on children's oral health. Establishing long-term sustainable state support for health equity and the Office of Population Health Equity at the Maine CDC is necessary to have state-level leadership on this topic and increase Maine's ability to provide data on health inequities which is currently lacking.

We have spoken up in support of ending the sale of tobacco flavors before (see [testimony](#) from 2021 on LD 1550: An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products). In addition to fueling addiction to tobacco among kids, the negative oral health effects of nicotine and e-cigarette flavoring are well-documented. It is well-known that nicotine restricts blood flow to the gums, which can affect the mouth's ability to fight off infection and heal. This can lead to gum disease and tooth loss.¹ Even e-cigarettes without nicotine can have serious consequences for oral health because of how the chemicals in e-cigarettes affect the mouth's microbiome, by disrupting the delicate balance of bacteria in the mouth and inhibiting saliva that is necessary to maintain good oral health.^{2,3}

Vaping creates a perfect storm in your mouth for the bacteria that causes cavities to thrive and cause irreparable damage to teeth and gums through several mechanisms. What this means for children is

¹ Precker, Michael. (2020, August 26). *Need another reason not to vape? Your oral health is at risk*. American Heart Association. <https://www.heart.org/en/news/2020/08/26/need-another-reason-not-to-vape-your-oral-health-is-at-risk>

² Tomar, S. L., Fox, C. H., Connolly, G. N. (2015). Electronic Cigarettes: The Tobacco Industry's latest threat to oral health? *Journal of the American Dental Association* 146(9),651-653. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adaj.2015.07.002>

³ Kim S.A., Smith S., Beauchamp C., Song Y., Chiang M., Giuseppetti A., et al. (2018) Cariogenic potential of sweet flavors in electronic-cigarette liquids. *PLoS ONE* 13(9): e0203717. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0203717>



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that they are being targeted with flavoring that can likely hook them on tobacco and nicotine as well as cause poor oral health outcomes for their entire life.

Finally, as you have heard from us numerous times before, oral health is often under-resourced and the first program to be cut when funding is threatened. Thus, we support identifying a solution to maintain the sustainability of tobacco settlement funds through the creation of the Trust for a Healthy Maine. Further information about our stance on the Trust is available in our testimony on LD 1523: An Act to Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony and please be in touch if you have any questions.