

LD 1523 – An Act To Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine

Testimony of Linda Sanborn, M.D.

February 4, 2022

Good afternoon, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and esteemed colleagues on the Health and Human Services Committee. I am Linda Sanborn, a resident of Gorham, a retired family physician and state legislator. I'm here today to testify in favor of LD 1523, An Act to Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine. I want to express my gratitude to Representative Millett for bringing this important bill forward.

In the 129th Legislature I served on the Appropriation & Financial Affairs Committee, and I was honored to be the Senate lead on LD 1961, a bipartisan bill sponsored by Honorable Denny Keschl, which was unfortunately left unfinished in the spring of 2020 because of COVID.

We knew then that a serious structural deficit in the Fund for a Healthy Maine was looming large. We also knew we were facing serious threats to our population's health and productivity, including concern trends in vaping, youth suicide, diabetes, opioid addiction, and infant mortality. Even before COVID, our children were facing new risks to their health while employers were struggling to maintain and grow a healthy work force.

Like all states, Maine receives tobacco settlement payments because our people tried tobacco as kids, got addicted to nicotine as young adults, and in too many cases, got sick and too often died early as a result of their tobacco use. We can all name family or friends who've been lost to tobacco-related illness. That's why tobacco prevention, the tobacco settlement, and this bill that would restructure, stabilize, and modernize our use of the settlement transcends political party.

I've attached an op/ed that Rep. Keschl and I authored two years ago. The story we told is as true today as it was then. We have a responsibility and an opportunity to act. Ignoring the structural deficit in the Fund for a Healthy Maine until next year will only make it harder to solve. Inertia or inaction is not a viable option. We must challenge ourselves to step boldly into the future. LD 1523 takes a proactive, smart approach. It charts a course to a long-term solution by protecting the settlement for tobacco prevention and public health.

Stabilizing and restructuring the tobacco settlement could jumpstart and sustain a modern, cost-effective system of public health. And when political and economic circumstances change, we will have a more evolved structure in place, with built-in protections, for ensuring this special revenue source is used as it was intended – to prevent youth tobacco use and improve public health.

Thank you for considering anew this important bill. I'd be glad to answer any questions you may have or be available for the work session.

ATTACH OP/ED