

## **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**

Honorable Senator Claxton and Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for your attention to my testimony. My name is Patricia Clark. I am testifying in support of **LD 1693: An Act to Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-Being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust**

I would like to focus primarily on the element of this bill that would end the sales of flavored tobacco products in Maine. I am here to offer my experience of 35 years as an educator; first in elementary school and currently at the college level with a focus on Early Childhood Education.

I have been working with children and families over the years, and now teach students of all ages 16 to 70. For the past 10 years I have supervised interns, field placements, and student teachers in schools at all levels. When I was teaching elementary school, I witnessed how addiction to tobacco and nicotine products made families struggle to pay for that use in more ways than one.

Young adults use tobacco at higher rates than older adults. They are also more likely to be parenting toddlers and infants. And more likely to have fewer financial resources. I have seen the havoc tobacco can wreak with smokers and their families. We have been relatively successful in the campaign to move smoking outside of the home, although there is still a lot of in the home smoking. The recommendation to smoke outside the home has taken many years to get to this level of compliance – which is totally ignored in many cars and homes

Another strategy many parents embraced for not smoking around little ones has been to use e-cigarette and other vaping products because of the message that ‘vapor’ is safer than smoke. And many consider vaping to ‘be not smoking’. The flavors and scents mask the nicotine, but it is nicotine that addicts. For those who are using vaping to quit, then it is important to note that with banning the sale of flavors, there is still access to vaping, although the nicotine would not be camouflaged.

The costs were great of this addiction to tobacco, especially with impoverished families. The needs of children were no longer more important than the next smoke. We know now that second hand smoke is nearly as bad if not worse than first. And are learning that second hand vape is also bad for children. I saw children constantly absent from school because of upper respiratory and asthma problems and even their pets were sick!

On a bright note, I viewed smoking go down in middle school and high school. Then I saw a huge surge in students trying and then becoming hooked on different tobacco products. Flavored tobacco –too many flavors to count with vaping and menthol cigarettes.

According to the Journal of the American Medical Association, 4 out of 5 children who have used tobacco began with a flavored product. One notable cause - the current variety of menthol,

mint, candy, and fruit flavored products are aimed at preteens and teens with packaging and marketing geared toward new smokers, not current. Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids reports that the Tobacco Industry research shows that 95% of adult smokers begin by age 21. The flavors hooks kids – and builds a new generation of people hooked on tobacco.

There have been 15,000 flavored tobacco products with innocuous-sounding names such as Banana Blast, Cherry Crush, Cotton Candy, Peppermint Mocha, and Pop Tart according to Analysis of Brand Websites in the Journal of Medical Internet Research. The names sound like flavors at Star Bucks or Dairy Queen, harmless. Flavored cigarettes and vaping mask the true tobacco taste.

Flavored tobacco products including cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, and e-cigarettes have chipped away at all the progress made in cutting nicotine use in minors. While nearly all e-cigarettes contain nicotine according to the Drug and Alcohol Dependence, more than half of Maine youngsters say they think it is “harmless” flavoring reports the 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey.

The most dangerous flavored tobacco product turns out to be menthol cigarettes because the menthol flavoring makes it easier to start and stay addicted to cigarettes. It masks the harsh taste of tobacco and numbs the throat making it easier to inhale more deeply wrote The American Journal of Health Behavior. People smoking menthols actually show greater signs of addiction and are often less likely to successfully quit smoking.

The tobacco industry has a long and deadly history of targeting youngsters with flavored products with subtle advertising. Maine is experiencing what Pediatrics Journal reports as “A Public Health Crisis: Electronic Cigarettes, Vape, and Juul,” an explosion of e-cigarette or vaping with teens. Juul, a high-tech device disguised as a USB drive that comes in a variety of flavors to entice youngsters. In the same article, one Juul pot has as much nicotine as a pack of 20 cigarettes. Since young are more susceptible to the tobacco addiction. We must stop this extreme escalation of vaping. One way to do this is to halt sale of flavored tobacco products in Maine. The health of future generations is at stake. Please vote yes for LD 1693: An Act to Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-Being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust

We need a good plan for prevention, we need racial and ethnic and other socially related health disparities to be addressed, we need funding for a plan-full approach to the health of Maine’s children. And we need to end the sale of flavored tobacco.

I have included the resources below if you wish to review just a small amount of the research on the flavors issue.

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Sources:

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11 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the National Institutes of Health and National Cancer Institute, "Marketing Tobacco to LGBT Communities", <https://smokefree.gov/marketing-tobacco-lgbt-communities>, Accessed December 11, 2020.

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13 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the Office of the U.S Surgeon General and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office on Smoking and Health, 2020. <https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/knowtherisks.html>, Accessed December 11, 2020.

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