



Maine's Recovery Hub

**Testimony of Leslie Clark
In Favor of LD 1693:
An Act To Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and
Create a Health Trust**

Committee on Health & Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Leslie Clark
Executive Director
Portland Recovery Community Center
102 Bishop Street
Portland, Maine 04103

Re: Written Testimony in Favor of Passing LD 1693

February 9, 2022

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

I am writing to you today as the Executive Director of Portland Recovery Community Center (PRCC) and as a person in long-term recovery in support of ending the sale of flavored tobacco products in Maine. The board of the PRCC unanimously supports this important legislation.

PRCC is a recovery community organization. Our mission is to provide support, education and resources for people recovering from and affected by addiction and to spread the message of hope throughout the state of Maine. We serve as the recovery hub in Maine, building a statewide network of recovery community centers and supports.

We are people in recovery, and we care about the issue of addiction. We know what it is like to be addicted – and we know what it takes to recover. As a recovery community organization, we advocate to help Maine communities understand the science of addiction and dispel the misconception that there is any choice or freedom once affected by addiction. In fact, addiction is a chronic and progressive illness that robs an individual of personal choice and freedom.

The tobacco industry and the pharmaceutical industry have targeted our youth and vulnerable populations to create a market fed by addiction. We have been purposefully lied to, manipulated,



**Portland
Recovery Community
Center**

Maine's Recovery Hub

and targeted. *Today we are fighting back.* We will not sit by while a new generation is prey for the tobacco industry.

As our brothers and sisters are dying in the streets from the opioid epidemic, and we fight every day to save and restore lives destroyed by opioid manufacturers, the Maine legislature is simultaneously debating a policy that could *prevent* the next generation from being susceptible to the devastating impact of another addiction.

Now, nearly one in three Maine children are using tobacco products – and we know based on national studies that the overwhelming majority of tobacco use starts with flavored products. Banning flavors shouldn't even be a question: we should be protecting Maine's children and future.

We recognize that some individuals in recovery may use these flavored products, and it is not an easy issue. **But**, the tobacco industry knows that 95% of adult smokers start by age 21, so flavored products are purposefully being marketed directly to youth in our communities. The tobacco industry has co-opted messages of harm reduction, misconstruing the idea that e-cigarettes can be used as a harm reduction tool for tobacco smokers wishing to quit, further targeting our recovery community. This is an inaccurate representation of how to reduce harm. E-cigarettes are not risk-free, and PRCC knows that other pathways of recovery, such as Nicotine Replacement Therapy are the best, healthiest option if an individual would like to quit smoking cigarettes.

The tobacco industry has a long and lethal history of targeting Black Americans, people with mental illness, LGBTQ persons, people with low incomes, and other marginalized youth and young adults with predatory advertising of flavored products, lower prices, and sponsorships of events and celebrations. *All of these populations have something in common – a high rate of adverse childhood experiences and traumatic events that predispose us to addiction. The tobacco industry knows this and exploits it.*

Our recovery community does not only want to help people find recovery from addiction; we want to help prevent addiction and break the generational cycles. We know that a cornerstone of preventing addiction is preventing early use of tobacco products, because addiction as a brain disease develops early and evolves on a continuum. 75% of adults with a substance use disorder also have a history of cigarette smoking. That is why our board of directors and organization is speaking out on this issue.

We have the opportunity to give Maine youth and young adults a fair shot at a healthy and productive future, free from tobacco addiction. It is time to end the sale of flavored tobacco products. Help us break barriers to maintaining recovery and help us prevent more youth from



Maine's Recovery Hub

tobacco addiction. We urge you to prioritize the health, hope, and productivity of Maine kids to live a life free from tobacco addiction and the increased potential for addiction to other substances.

At the heart of the recovery culture is a desire to give back and help others find freedom from addiction, offering the hope and example of our own experiences of recovery. Anyone who has watched a loved one suffer and die from addiction, whether it's from a heroin overdose or a slow and painful death by lung cancer, knows that we would give anything to have prevented the ravages of addiction on our loved ones and our families.

Please help prevent and turn back the tide of destruction on young lives, families and communities.

Sincerely,

//Leslie M. Clark//

Leslie M. Clark, MSW

Executive Director

Portland Recovery Community Center