

Dear Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Julie Daigle. I work as a public health professional for Healthy Acadia in Hancock and Washington counties and I have a house in Cross Lake Township in Aroostook County, one of Maine's three poorest counties. Over the course of my public health career, I've worked in all but three of Maine's sixteen counties; I've seen the impacts of public health funding decisions across the top three-fourths of the state. I am writing in support of LD 1523 "An Act To Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine" and LD 1693 "An Act To Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust."

Maine has a solid history of support for tobacco prevention funding and preventative health programming in general, primarily through the creation of the Fund for a Healthy Maine (FHM) in 1999 from Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement monies. This was a pioneering vision for prioritizing prevention and the benefits that this approach can provide, from reducing the burden of chronic disease and lowering health care costs to reducing health disparities and promoting equitable opportunities for productive, happy citizens.

Since then, however, we have not lived up to that early potential. In an aging state which needs to prevent chronic disease before the cost mounts- which is the promise of prevention- we are already lagging. In our current situation, as much as 70% of the FHM monies are going to medical care, leaving much less available for health promotion and disease prevention programming. With more than \$35 million expected in revenue from both Master Settlement monies and from Racino funds, but with about \$55 million in allocations, we are facing even more precarious future decisions. We have to consider the possibility that there will be nothing left for prevention.

The FHM was created to remedy the costs and harms of tobacco use, which is, in great part, to reduce the chronic disease that results from its use. We should not borrow from our future health by deprioritizing public health efforts that reduce the conditions which lead to chronic disease; this is an expensive strategy. While it's very easy to think of tobacco use as a problem that has been solved already or to think of it as a relatively benign occurrence in an overall climate of crisis, we forget the basics:

- Nearly half a million people die in our country every year from tobacco related illness and in Maine, nearly 2400 people die each year from it.
- It might not seem like a huge number, but this is the greatest cause of death and disability in the US - greater than alcohol, AIDS, car crashes, illegal drugs, murders, and suicides combined.
- The healthcare burden of tobacco disproportionately affects some populations more than others.
- Tobacco negatively impacts nearly every system of the body, including some that are not necessarily intuitive, like the pancreas- smokers have a much higher risk of diabetes- and the immune system.

- The monetary impacts are widespread, damaging, and include far more than the healthcare costs alone, and the direct annual healthcare costs of all of this in Maine is about \$811 million.

Furthermore, the percentage of kids who are using vaping devices (these are also called e-cigarettes or electronic cigarettes) is sky-high. They are vaping at much higher rates than they ever smoked previously: According to 2019 Maine survey data, 14.2% of our middle school students have tried vaping/using e-cigarettes and half of those had used within the past month; 46.2% of high school students have tried it and nearly 30% of those had used in the past month. This means that nearly 1 in 3 Maine high school students were vaping and current estimates are that rates are even higher now. We do not know for certain what the long-term impacts of this will be, but we know that it won't be "nothing" and we know that flavorings in vaping liquids (this is part of the delivery mechanism for nicotine in e-cigarettes) and flavored tobacco are strong incentives for youth to use. Along with the increased use of nicotine among our most vulnerable populations comes an increase in addiction and an increased risk of the use of other addictive substances, as teens and students in elementary and high schools replace healthy coping strategies and normal brain development with the quick "fix" of a nicotine hit. Adults using vaping devices are also more likely to both smoke and vape, meaning increased negative health impacts.

Tobacco use kills slowly and it kills in hidden ways, so it's easy to overlook. It also has powerful support in tobacco company advertising: they spend about \$45.8 million in Maine annually to promote tobacco use. In contrast, we spent only \$11.8 million on tobacco use prevention in 2020 and according to the Tobacco Advisory Council, only \$4.3 million in more recent years. To stay abreast of tobacco company promotion efforts, it's critical to fund tobacco use prevention at the amount recommended by the CDC: \$15.9 million. Tobacco companies are counting on our legislators to ignore these realities, while they promote the flavored e-juice which gets our kids hooked early and ensures life-long customers.

To create positive change, we need to do two things: stop the sale of flavored tobacco and restructure the tobacco settlement to create the Trust for a Healthy Maine. This will protect our investment in the current and future health of every member of the public and build sustainable, connected, and healthy Maine communities. The proposal for the Trust has been cultivated from years of work, conversations with partners in Maine and across the U.S., examinations of states' statutes, and adjustments to strengthen protection for public health and to advance health equity. It takes a planful approach to addressing public health problems; prioritizing the tobacco program; investing in health equity for all Maine communities, in every county; and it uses the state health plan as a guide.

I believe these bills are good public health, economic, and social policy, and I respectfully urge you to support them. Thank you.

Julie Daigle
Cross Lake Township