

Alexis Guy
Portland
LD 1693

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

My name is Alexis Guy and I live in Portland. I am writing as a public health nutrition professional 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."

In 1999, Maine took a forward-thinking approach to protecting Master Settlement Agreement monies by creating the Fund for a Healthy Maine. The Fund was designed to receive and allocate Maine's approximately \$53.8 million per year to programs to prevent chronic disease, promote good health, reduce adverse experiences, lower health costs, and give Maine children and adults every opportunity to live healthy, productive lives – all without supplanting existing state investments or federal grants in these areas. Indeed, a 2009 review by the Maine Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability, "Maine has consistently prioritized preventive health services more than other states receiving [Tobacco MSA] funding."

Those decisions were made more than 30 years ago, so while Maine's leadership in prioritizing preventive health programming is important to acknowledge, it masks the equally important fact that allocations from the Fund for a Healthy Maine have not adhered to Maine lawmakers' founding vision and intent. We have seen as much as 70% of the fund going to medical care, leaving much less available for health promotion and disease prevention programming.

We are now facing a steep cliff: with more than \$20 million less expected in revenue (\$31 million), and about \$50 million in allocations; if we don't restructure how these funds are used now, there will be nothing left for public health.

The proposal before you - to create the Trust for a Healthy Maine - is a bold plan, 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. This proposal takes a planful approach to addressing public health problems, prioritizing the tobacco program and investing in health equity, and using the state health plan as a guide.

This legislation gives us the opportunity to make real investments in prevention and health promotion activities, for all people in Maine, which will naturally drive down health care costs. I see the importance of this shift demonstrated regularly through my nutrition work. Preventable nutrition-related chronic disease is an unnecessary burden for individuals and communities across the state.

We know this is a bold choice, but our other option - "do nothing" - puts Maine in the wrong direction. The Fund's structural deficit is very real and will have significant impacts on public health in Maine - at a time when we need it most.

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