

Jay Knowlton, MPH
Portland

Testimony in Support:
LD 1523 - An Act to Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine

Respected members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Jay Knowlton; I'm a resident of Portland and serve as Vice President of the Maine Public Health Association. I am in **strong support of LD 1523** - "An Act to Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine." I am a lifelong Mainer with generations of family history here, and a graduate of both the University of Maine Orono and the University of Southern Maine. I am proud of Maine's rich heritage. "As Maine goes, so goes the Nation," and "Dirigo - I lead" are mottos that have played out time and time again in our history. Now is the time to demonstrate this leadership again.

When the Tobacco Settlement was first agreed to, Maine showed leadership by setting up the Fund for a Healthy Maine, investing heavily in tobacco prevention (with great success), and laying the foundation for greater public health investments for years to come. By many measures, the Fund for a Healthy Maine has been a success story for decades. Yet in recent years, we have watched these dollars be reallocated to meet other financial obligations, namely within the MaineCare program. This is not what the Fund was meant to do. Undoubtedly, MaineCare serves a critical need; we know that MaineCare investments pay off in the long run and we must fund MaineCare. However, we also know that public health investments pay even greater dividends in the long run. In fact, the return on public health investment is so great that we often don't realize just how important it is until we're met with a crisis like the pandemic we've lived through in the past two years. We have learned that investments in preparedness, surveillance, and prevention can keep our economy open and people healthy.

Now is the time to prioritize public health investments. LD 1523 provides a thoughtful plan to make this prioritization a reality by aligning MaineCare expenditures from the General Fund, funding the tobacco prevention and control program at the CDC recommended level, and establishing an appropriate governing body to prioritize ongoing public health investments for years to come.

We cannot afford to lose the urgency that the pandemic has placed on shoring up our public health investments. The time is now. I urge you to pass LD 1523 to protect our future and continue to lead in the way that Mainers have always led.

Respectfully,

Jay Knowlton, MPH
jay.s.knowlton@gmail.com