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February 9, 2022

Testimony of Representative Melanie Sachs, co-sponsor of LD 1523 “An Act To Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine” before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

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

My name is Melanie Sachs, and I am honored to represent House District 48, which includes Freeport and part of Pownal. I am before you today as a co-sponsor and strong supporter of LD 1523. One of the strengths of the 130th Legislature has been the willingness to not only identify difficult problems, but to also attempt to develop long-term, sustainable solutions. This has been seen in such areas as affordable housing, criminal justice reform, and equity. This is also true of the bill before you, “An Act to Establish the Trust for Healthy Maine.”

Despite our collective best efforts, we have been unable to maximize the return on investment from the monies Maine receives each year from the tobacco Master Settlement. The Fund for a Healthy Maine, where those funds are deposited, has been increasingly used to fund medical care instead of prioritizing tobacco prevention and control and other public health programs. We recently heard a bill in the Tax Committee by Representative McCreight that seeks to assure that the funding directed to tobacco prevention programs “may not be less than the lesser of the amount of tax collected on tobacco products ... plus funds available in the Fund for a Healthy Maine”; or “the funding level recommended for this State by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention pursuant to its determination for state tobacco control programs”, in an attempt to assure a sustained funding stream. That bill, in conjunction with the bill before you today, seeks to protect our state’s investment in this – and other important – programs. LD 1523 will ensure oversight, investment, and flexibility, with the ability to both respond to immediate needs as well as provide long-term stabilization. It is a recognition that we must find a sustainable solution to funding critical prevention programs. As you have heard many times in this Committee, sustained investments in public health and prevention programs net a much greater return by both improving health outcomes and reducing overall health costs for the citizens of Maine.

I urge you to unanimously support LD 1523 as a prudent measure from fiscal, public health, and planning perspectives. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about this important bill.