

Edward Walworth MD
Lewiston
LD 1523

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

My name is Edward Walworth. I am writing as a health professional (MD) 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.

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.

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.

As a member of the Maine Medical Association and its Public Health Committee, I believe these bills are good public health, economic, and social policy, and I respectfully urge you to support them. Thank you.