

# MaineHealth

## MaineHealth Local Health Systems

Franklin Community  
Health Network  
LincolnHealth  
MaineHealth Care At Home  
Maine Behavioral Healthcare  
Memorial Hospital  
Maine Medical Center  
Mid Coast-Parkview Health  
NorDx  
Pen Bay Medical Center  
Southern Maine Health Care  
Synernet  
Waldo County General Hospital  
Western Maine Health

## Part of the MaineHealth Family

MaineHealth Accountable  
Care Organization

## MaineHealth Affiliates

MaineGeneral Health  
New England Rehabilitation  
Hospital of Portland  
St. Mary's Health System

## Annie Coates, MD, MaineHealth Testimony in Support of LD 1423

### **“An Act To Prevent and Reduce Tobacco Use by Ensuring Adequate Funding for Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Programs and by Raising the Tax on Tobacco Products and To Provide Funding To Reduce Disparities in Health Outcomes Based on Certain Factors”**

**Thursday, May 13, 2021**

Senator Chipman, Representative Terry, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation, I am Dr. Annie Coates, and I am one of four pediatric pulmonologists in Maine. I am here today to testify on behalf of MaineHealth in support of LD 1423, “An Act To Prevent and Reduce Tobacco Use by Ensuring Adequate Funding for Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Programs and by Raising the Tax on Tobacco Products and To Provide Funding To Reduce Disparities in Health Outcomes Based on Certain Factors.”

MaineHealth is Maine’s largest integrated non-profit health care system that provides a full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. MaineHealth has long supported strong tobacco prevention and treatment programs for our patients, employees and communities – we know that tobacco use is one of the most preventable health problems facing our state and nation.

In 2001, we established the Maine Center for Tobacco Independence (CTI). In partnership with the Maine Centers for Disease Prevention and Control, MaineHealth implements the Maine QuitLink. The MaineHealth Center for Tobacco Independence also works with 16 community organizations to create tobacco and smoke-free environments across Maine, and help Maine youth and young adults be tobacco-free.

The legislation before you today supports MaineHealth’s mission and vision of “Working Together So Maine’s Communities are the Healthiest in America,” because increasing the cost of tobacco products will ultimately reduce the number of tobacco users in Maine.

I care for hundreds of children from across the state with serious health conditions, and I am here today because I care for too many impacted by the harmful effects of tobacco and nicotine. With one in four Maine high school students now using e-cigarettes – a rate that has nearly doubled in the past two years – something must be done. I would like to remind this Committee that this isn’t just a statistic. These are our children.

Three months ago, I was consulted on a previously healthy adolescent who was admitted to the Barbara Bush Children's Hospital Pediatric Intensive Care Unit in respiratory failure. Over the past year, he started smoking flavored e-cigarettes (supplied by "friends") daily. His impression at the time was that he was inhaling "just flavored water" and that they "wouldn't get him addicted, like his parents were to cigarettes." What he didn't understand was the extent of the harmful effects of e-cigarettes and that they did likely have nicotine in them, which he had since become addicted to, and directly contributed to his critical health condition. But, the damage didn't just stop there for him. He had gone from being "a good student" to skipping school to smoke, which resulted in failing multiple classes. Furthermore, he developed a multitude of other daily symptoms (headaches, difficulty concentrating, and abdominal pain) all that can be attributed to nicotine addiction.

Increasing the tobacco tax in Maine, which hasn't increased since 2005, has the potential to curb a transition from electronic nicotine to combustible nicotine in our children. Additionally, the revenue from this tax could be employed to combat the new wave of youth nicotine addiction through combating youth vaping and e-cigarette usage, hopefully returning it to the levels seen prior to vaping being introduced to our schools. This in effect will reduce our future adult smoking rate and curb health care costs for decades to come.

Before I close, for individuals looking for support to quit smoking, vaping, or other tobacco use, I encourage them to contact the Maine QuitLink at 1-800-QUIT-NOW for free support and coaching. This is evidenced-based and effective - The Phone Coaching Program quit rate (30-day) is 36% for tobacco users that complete at least 4 calls of the multi-call program, compared to unassisted quit rates are generally reported as approximately 3%.

As a pediatric pulmonologist, as a mother, as a resident of Maine who has dedicated my career to the health of our communities, please use your voice, your vote and support this critical legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.