

MaineHealth

**Testimony of Katie Fullam Harris
MaineHealth
Regarding Certain Sections in LD 221
The Governor's Proposed Budget
Before the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Services and
Health and Human Services
February 18, 2021**

Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees of Appropriations and Financial Services and Health and Human Services, I am Katie Fullam Harris of MaineHealth, and I am writing to share our significant concerns with the proposed \$5 million annual cut to the evidence-based tobacco use prevention and cessation program.

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. Every day, MaineHealth's over 23,000 employees are committed to fulfilling our vision of "working together so our communities are the healthiest in America."

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 problem 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, training for health care providers and other professionals throughout the state, and technical assistance regarding tobacco-free policies.

Additionally, in 2016, MaineHealth partnered with the Maine CDC to implement and lead Domain 2: Tobacco Use and Exposure Prevention. As part of Maine Prevention Services, the MaineHealth Center for Tobacco Independence works with 16 community organizations to create tobacco and smoke-free environments across Maine, and help Maine youth and young adults be tobacco-free.

In October 2019, CTI received additional funds, as part of an additional \$5 million of the Fund for a Healthy Maine allocated by the 129th Legislature for expanded tobacco prevention and control efforts. With the additional funding, CTI was able to respond to the alarming increased use of electronic tobacco products by high school students by expanding available school supports through a Partnership Form Agreement including: assistance with communications, implementation and enforcement supports, alternatives to suspension being included in policies and education and training opportunities for students, staff and parents. Additionally, the additional funds allowed for a more robust presence at the community level with about 20 FTE

added. Within CTI, 2 additional staff were added to provide increased support for District Tobacco Prevention Partners, as well as increased coordination of statewide secondhand smoke efforts.

According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC), evidence-based, statewide tobacco control programs that are comprehensive, sustained, and accountable have been shown to reduce the number of people who smoke, as well as tobacco-related diseases and deaths. For every dollar spent on tobacco prevention, states can reduce tobacco-related health care expenditures and hospitalizations by up to \$55.

With that said, the US CDC recommends that the State of Maine invest \$15.9 million in tobacco control programming. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, the state tobacco control program was funded at \$13.9 million, which was reduced to \$13.8 million in the Governor's curtailment order. The \$5 million annual cut included in the proposed biennial budget will bring the State's total investment down to \$8.8 million, despite the fact that Maine brought in over \$180 million in tobacco-related revenue in FY 2021 alone. If the \$5 million reduction were to come directly from tobacco programming, this would result in a 35.7% cut in funding to CTI.

At a time when almost 18% of adults in Maine are smokers and nearly 30% of Maine high school students reported use of an electronic vapor product in the past 30 days, we can ill afford to drastically cut funding to this critical and lifesaving program. Instead, we urge the Legislature to fund the state tobacco prevention and treatment program at the US CDC recommended level of \$15.9 million per year in the biennial budget.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.