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

Testimony of Jonathan C. Fellers, MD

Maine Behavioral Healthcare

In Support of LD 1190, “An Act to Prohibit the Sale and Distribution of Flavored Tobacco Products”

Monday, March 25, 2019

Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Dr. Jonathan Fellers, and I am an addiction psychiatrist at Maine Medical Center and the Medical Director of the Maine Tobacco Helpline. As part of MaineHealth’s mission of “Working Together So Maine’s Communities are the Healthiest in America,” I am here today to testify in support of LD 1190 because it supports this mission and vision by banning the sale and distribution of flavored tobacco products.

The advent of electronic nicotine products – for which flavors are a critical marketing and use component – has resulted in a spike in youth use, with national data highlighting a 78% increase in use of electronic products by high schoolers in the past year (National Youth Tobacco Survey, 2018). In 2017, 15.9% of Maine High School students reported use of an electronic vapor product in the past 30 days.

E-cigarette manufacturers use a form of “line extension” marketing by offering multiple flavors, such as Cherry Coke, Lime Coke, Vanilla Coke, etc., thereby increasing the shelf presence of these products. This form of marketing is working as demonstrated by the fact that 85% of high schoolers who use electronic products use flavored liquid nicotine.

Furthermore, you may remember that in the early 2000s workers in a microwave popcorn factory were sickened by breathing in diacetyl, which is a butter-flavored chemical. The chemical was linked to hundreds of cases of bronchiolitis obliterans or “popcorn lung,” a serious lung disease that causes coughing and shortness of breath. As a result, popcorn manufacturers ultimately removed diacetyl from their products, but the chemical has now been found in flavored e-cigarettes.

Recent research also shows that nicotine is a “gateway drug.” Nicotine makes the brain more susceptible to develop addiction to other substances. For example, rats that are exposed to nicotine first will more easily progress to cocaine addiction.

The rate at which youth in Maine are becoming addicted to electronic nicotine products is truly staggering and we believe that LD 1190 takes an important step forward in helping to curb e-cigarette use amongst school aged children by banning sale and distribution of flavored tobacco products.

Because of the factors noted above, I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1190, "An Act to Prohibit the Sale and Distribution of Flavored Tobacco Products." Thank you for your time and consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions.

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