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April 11, 2019

**Testimony of Rep. Joyce “Jay” McCreight
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation
Presenting L.D. 1028**

An Act to Prevent and Reduce Tobacco Use by Adequately Funding Tobacco Control and Raising the Price of Tobacco Products

Senator Chipman, Representative Tipping, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation, I am Jay McCreight, Representative for HD 51, which includes Harpswell, West Bath and part of Brunswick. I am here to present **LD 1028, An Act to Prevent and Reduce Tobacco Use by Adequately Funding Tobacco Control and Raising the Price of Tobacco Products.**

The concept of this bill is simple — it increases the tobacco excise tax by \$1.50 and taxes all other tobacco products at an equivalent rate. The reasons are simple too — sound tax policy and sound health policy.

A conservative estimate is that passage of this bill would result in more than \$50 million in revenue annually. This estimate is based on a model developed by three organizations that are national experts in tobacco policy - the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, and tobacconomics.

This bill directs a portion of the projected revenue to be used to bring the funding of Maine’s tobacco prevention and control program in line with the funding level recommended for Maine by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It also directs some funding to cover the costs associated with an anticipated increase in demand for cessation treatment for MaineCare members. It also provides for increased funding for enforcement of the laws regarding tobacco sales. The bill likely leaves more than \$30 million unallocated.

Tobacco use is the number-one risk factor for four of the top five leading causes of death in Maine - cancer, heart disease, stroke, and lung disease. It’s estimated that 2,400 deaths in Maine are caused by smoking each year – that’s seven per day. According to the Institute of Medicine, the U.S. Surgeon General, and the World Health Organization, increases in tobacco taxes are a highly effective means of reducing tobacco use. The \$1.50 increase is not a random number picked out of thin air. It is the increase shown to be necessary to achieve a significant public health impact with a projected reduction in youth smoking by 16.4 percent.

This tax increase must apply to all tobacco products. To be effective in prevention and cessation, we need a comprehensive approach to tobacco control and that means equivalent taxes, whether we are talking about combustible cigarettes, pipe tobacco, small and large cigars or e-cigarettes.

To reduce the toll taken on the health of Mainers, on health care costs, on loss of worker productivity, and on our state budget, we need to both prevent youth from becoming tobacco users and support and incentivize current tobacco users of any age to quit. The tobacco industry knows that in order to continue to make money, it needs to find replacement tobacco users and replacement products. We've seen this in the rapid growth of the e-cigarette industry. Just ask any middle or high school teacher or administrator - they'll tell you how this has sparked youth tobacco use. Since almost 90 percent of adult tobacco users started using tobacco before the age of 18, the industry knows that the place to find those replacements is among young people. For every three kids who are prevented from smoking as a result of a higher tax on tobacco products, there is one less smoking-related death in the future.

Let me put it this way. The allocated portions of the funding would be used to give this proposal a bigger bang for the buck by helping current tobacco users quit and by supporting the program that's purpose is to provide education programs aimed at preventing kids from becoming tobacco users in the first place.

You may know that I worked for 30+ years as a social worker specializing in work with children, adolescents, and families. I saw firsthand the devastating impact that tobacco use can have on families. I led Grieving Groups for an alarming number of middle schoolers whose parents or grandparents had died from tobacco-use-related illnesses - heart attacks, lung disease, cancer.

And I saw my dad, a WWII Navy Veteran, die of lung cancer at 76 - much too young. He died just days before my daughter, his grandchild, was to graduate the same college he and my mother attended. He was looking forward to returning to his old stomping ground and celebrating her success. He was within a few months of reaching his five-year anniversary of being cigarette-free when he was diagnosed with untreatable lung cancer. He died six weeks later.

When my father served in the Navy, cigarettes were handed out with rations, and he got hooked. I watched him try to stop for years. He suffered first one heart attack, then a second. I remember the day when I asked him why he kept looking at his watch. It was because he was watching minute by minute until an hour had elapsed at which point he could have a cigarette. Counting his life by minutes - it's a terrible addiction. He eventually managed to quit, but it was too late. Had he never started or had he had access to a cessation program, he might still be here.

I encourage you to think about anyone you know who has struggled with tobacco addiction and has suffered from a tobacco-related illness, and about their families who suffer with them. By passing this bill, we have the opportunity to support one of the most effective ways this committee and this legislature has to prevent our kids and grandkids from ever smoking, and to help incentivize more tobacco users to quit.

The tobacco industry, and those who sell this deadly product, will likely use the same tactics they always do to try to kill this idea — exaggerations and scare tactics. I urge you to consider that these tactics are proof that this industry knows that tobacco taxes work and that they pose a serious threat to their ability to profit from sales of their incredibly harmful products. And that's what's really scary.

I appreciate the opportunity to present this bill to you. I'll be happy to try to answer your questions.