Good afternoon Senator Brakey, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Angela Westhoff and I am the executive director of the Maine Osteopathic Association. My organization does not financially benefit from the Fund for a Healthy Maine but the MOA believes in the effectiveness of prevention and control and believes in the policies and programs that result from the FHM. Maine Osteopathic Association is a member of the Friends and I am here today to testify on behalf of the Friends of the Fund for a Healthy Maine in support of LD 1294.

For years, you and your predecessors have heard the Friends testify on the defensive against proposed cuts to Maine’s primary source of prevention funding, the Fund for a Healthy Maine (FHM). Today is a little different. LD 1294 is a proactive and exciting bill. LD 1294 seeks to allocate tobacco settlement money that came to Maine last year as a result of successful arbitration because Maine successfully proved that we had “diligently enforced” our part of the Master Tobacco Settlement. This process took 10 years, but the conclusion was never in doubt. Maine and our Attorney Generals have always done our part and followed the rules outlined by the Settlement.

Two years ago, when it became apparent that Maine had won the arbitration, the Friends of the Fund for a Healthy Maine met to discuss the most appropriate way to allocate the money. We understood that this was a one-time payment, so filling previous program or position cuts was not a good option. However, we knew that the approximately $5 million that Maine will receive should be retained within the Fund and spent to boost efforts to make Maine healthier.
We decided that each of the eight FHM categories areas would come up with evidence-based ideas to spend a portion of the funds that would fill a need and move Maine forward. We wanted the best ideas without restrictions. In the end, you will see that LD 1294 contains a variety of ambitious public health programs that are critically important and can be implemented within one year. You will also note that this bill does not propose to allocate the full arbitration amount—only 3.8 million. It is our thought that other evidence-based public health initiatives could be funded with the remainder of these funds, or it could be rolled back into the Fund for a Healthy Maine for allocation within the next fiscal year.

We understand that LD 1294 itself is not incredibly detailed. However, the information and ideas behind the bill are detailed, evidence-based and well thought out. There are representatives here today that will be discussing sections of the bill and we can ensure any questions you may have are answered at the work session.

The organizations who advocate for, or implement the FHM programs share common goals. We want Maine children to avoid drugs and tobacco and for adults to quit. We want Maine parents and caregivers to have the tools to make good decisions for their children. We want Maine seniors and those at-risk to have access to the care and medication they need. We want all Mainers to have healthy mouths and smiles, to get proper nutrition and exercise to live long and productive lives. The FHM programs help save the state money by preventing disease before it starts, by helping parents get to work and by educating us all on ways to be more healthy and productive.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me today and I am happy to answer any questions you may have either today or at the work session.