Senator Hill, Representative Rotundo, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee. My name is Angela Cole Westhoff. I am the President of the Maine Public Health Association. I am here today to testify on behalf of our more than 400 members in support of LD 1719.

Time and time again, MPHA has stood before you asking that the limited resources in the Fund for a Healthy Maine are put toward best practice, evidence-based prevention and health promotion efforts. Today is no different in this regard. I should note that MPHA does not receive any funds from the Fund for a Healthy Maine.

Prevention is the cornerstone of public health, and we know from experience and research that prevention works. Whether it is helping smokers quit, giving kids a healthy start, supporting new parents, helping families get active or teaching students about healthy choices, prevention provides the foundation for a healthier state. Investing in prevention initiatives means lower health care costs, and greater workforce productivity.

LD 1719 is filled with exciting ideas to help the important prevention programs within the Fund for a Healthy Maine. MPHA is particularly excited about the obesity and tobacco outreach campaigns—but are here to support all the Fund for a
Healthy Maine programs. We know how critical a safe, healthy early childhood is to set the foundation of a healthy life. We know that without access to preventative oral health care, our ER’s will continue to be full. Our underfunded community health programs know that their programs and strategies work, but due to cuts a few years ago have scaled back evidence-based programs, including greatly reducing evidence-based community interventions for tobacco control and obesity prevention. According to the recently updated US CDC Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs, “the active and coordinated involvement of a wide range of societal and community resources must be the foundation of sustained solutions to pervasive problems like tobacco use.” The report goes on to state: “The strongest evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of many of the population-wide approaches that are most highly recommended by the Task Force on Community Preventive Services comes from studies in which specific strategies for smoking cessation, preventing tobacco use initiation, and eliminating exposure to secondhand smoke are combined with mass-media campaigns and efforts to mobilize communities and to integrate these strategies into synergistic and multicomponent efforts.” The proposals outlined in this bill, combined with the state’s existing tobacco control program activities, will allow Maine to stimulate evidence-based tobacco control efforts and once again lead the nation in reducing tobacco use.

In the past, you have in general wisely invested in proven community-based programs through the Fund for a Healthy Maine. Head Start, School Based Health Centers, Healthy Maine Partnerships, Home Visitation, Oral Health are not the political flavor of the month, they are backed by science and recognized by authorities like the US CDC as best practice.

We need to continue to offer the citizens of Maine all the tools needed to take personal responsibility to make the right choices. The initiatives in LD 1719 strive to meet that goal. We urge you to support LD 1719. Thank you.