

February 1, 2021

Public Health Committee
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Raised S.B. No. 326 - Oppose

To the Honorable Co-Chairs and members of the Public Health Committee:

I am writing in opposition to **Raised S.B. No. 326** and the inclusion of currently legal menthol cigarettes in the proposed ban on flavored tobacco products. As leader of my congregation, it is my moral duty to examine prospective laws and ensure they will serve the greater good for my members and all the communities that they are enforced upon. As the great Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "In the end, for laws to be obeyed, men must believe they are right."

I fully support Connecticut's efforts to reduce the use of tobacco - especially by the youth. However, I am concerned that the proposed ban is currently written too broadly and will have unintentional consequences that disproportionately criminalize the African American adults.

The inclusion of menthol cigarettes in the proposed ban disproportionately criminalizes African American adults and includes unintended consequences.

Menthol cigarettes only make up 1/3 of the current market, yet 80% of African Americans in U.S. who smoke cigarettes smoke menthol cigarettes. Thus, the proposed ban of menthol cigarettes disproportionately punishes and stigmatizes African American smokers. A menthol ban would also create increased interaction between law enforcement and members of our community. As you understand this is quite concerning as we continue to fight for police accountability when working with the African American community. With high profile cases such as Eric Gardner who died at the hands of an officer for selling a loose cigarette, it is imperative that we do not support laws that may increase police interaction.

Again, I in no way support the use of tobacco. I do however, I ask you to carefully review the proposed ban and moderate it so that does not criminalize and stigmatize the community I serve.

"The Children are OUR Future"

Thank you,

Brewer