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**Testimony of Marc Donald, Executive Director**

**In Support of**

S.B. No. 326 (RAISED) AN ACT PROHIBITING THE SALE OF FLAVORED CIGARETTES, TOBACCO PRODUCTS, ELECTRONIC NICOTINE DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND VAPOR PRODUCTS.

**Public Health Committee, February 8, 2021**

Senator Daugherty Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Hwang, Representative Somers, and Members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Marc Donald and I am the Executive Director of the Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership (RYASAP). We are an organization specializing in building healthy communities by convening stakeholders to develop solutions at a grassroots level.

I am here today to support S.B. No. 326 (RAISED) AN ACT PROHIBITING THE SALE OF FLAVORED CIGARETTES, TOBACCO PRODUCTS, ELECTRONIC NICOTINE DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND VAPOR PRODUCTS.

According to the FDA, **menthol cigarettes lead to increased smoking initiation among youth and young adults, greater addiction and decreased success in quitting smoking.**<sup>1</sup> Whether smoking traditional cigarettes, chew or smoking out of a battery-operated device it's the leading preventable cause of death and disease in the United States of America. Addiction is serious, and can lead to lifelong health burdens and premature mortality. 95% of adult smokers began before reaching the age 21.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) reports that Southwest Connecticut (SW CT) has greater awareness of the risks of cigarette smoking, lower use of tobacco, and lower use of cigarettes compared to the state and country. However, menthol cigarettes increase youth initiation and half (50.1%) of youth who have ever tried smoking initiated with menthol-flavored cigarettes.<sup>2</sup> Between 2010 and 2020, it was estimated that 2.3 million people would start smoking because of menthol cigarettes.<sup>3</sup>

Flavored e-cigarettes continue the tobacco industry's long history of targeting kids with flavored products. Quite literally, the tobacco industry is using candy-flavored products to target and entice young people to start, and thus become addicted to e-cigarettes, cigars, and menthol cigarettes. Research shows that flavors are a key part of youth use.

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<sup>1</sup> FDA. *Preliminary Scientific Evaluation of the Possible Public Health Effects of Menthol versus Nonmenthol Cigarettes* (2013) <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/ScienceResearch/SpecialTopics/PeerReviewofScientificInformationandAssessments/UCM361598.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> FDA. *Preliminary Scientific Evaluation of the Possible Public Health Effects of Menthol versus Nonmenthol Cigarettes* (2013).

<sup>3</sup> TPSAC, *Menthol Cigarettes and Public Health: Review of the Scientific Evidence and Recommendations*, July 21, 2011 <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/AdvisoryCommittees/CommitteesMeetingMaterials/TobaccoProductsScientificAdvisoryCommittee/UCM269697.pdf>

Vaping is increasing dramatically in SW CT especially amongst teens. In a 2017 youth survey in a local suburb, 25% of freshmen and sophomores and 45% of juniors and seniors reported vaping during the past month. 2018-2019 youth surveys in the region found that teens perceive vapes to be far less harmful than cigarettes. Approximately one in four high school students in Connecticut use e-cigarettes regularly. In addition to tobacco use, young adults frequently used to ingest marijuana. Teens who vape are more likely to smoke cigarettes.

Additionally, the banning of menthol cigarettes is a social justice issue. Menthol cigarettes were marketed specifically to adolescents and racial minorities in the US.<sup>4</sup> Menthol cigarettes are disproportionately sold in communities of color and the marketing targets youth. Quite simply, tobacco companies see the menthol market as a profit stream built off the backs of communities of color.

I am available to answer any questions as they arise and look forward to working with the committee on this issue further.

Thank you for your consideration to this pressing matter,

Marc Donald

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<sup>4</sup> Richardson A, Ganz O, Pearson J, et al. How the industry is marketing menthol cigarettes: the audience, the message and the medium. *Tob Control* 2015;24:594–600.