

**I am speaking in favor of S.B. No. 326 (RAISED) PUBLIC HEALTH. “AN ACT PROHIBITING THE SALE OF FLAVORED CIGARETTES, TOBACCO PRODUCTS, ELECTRONIC NICOTINE DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND VAPOR PRODUCTS.** My sister-in-law died of lung cancer. She smoked most of her life, starting as a teenager. She smoked menthol cigarettes. Smoking causes cancer, heart disease, stroke, lung disease, diabetes, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis. In the top 10 causes of death for blacks, five of those mentioned above are included: heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, chronic lower respiratory diseases. Smoking also increases risk for tuberculosis, certain eye diseases, and problems of the immune system, including rheumatoid arthritis.

Nine out of ten black Americans who smoke - smoke a menthol product. But it should not be surprising as African Americans were strategically targeted by the tobacco industry as the market for menthol products. TV and print ads featured blacks using menthol products. White Americans had the Marlboro man while we had the glamorous images of the “Kool” and “Newport” ads. Black organizations got lots of sponsorship monies for their events and causes, we had jazz and music concerts. These products were specifically marketed to us from the 50’s to now and they are now a part of our culture, with rappers, singers and artists including the brands in their art. Our parents and grandparents were the initial targets, but they passed down their habits and likes to their children and grandchildren.

Connecticut has declared “racism is a health issue”. The targeting of black people for menthol flavor products has led to a health crisis in the Black community. The cost of smoking is poor health, sometimes death. The health cost is high. When flavored tobacco / nicotine products (cigarettes, cigars, e-cigarettes, etc.) come up for debate, even if legislation is passed, somehow “menthol” gets removed from that legislation. Shows the power of money and the disregard of black health.

So, I say, if we are going to have this debate, ban all flavors, including menthol. We know that the flavors are in place to make the taste of the products more attractive to users. We understand – cherry, mint, grape, etc. as flavors, but until recently even I did not understand that menthol was a flavor, the original OG flavor.

My aunt who died of lung cancer left behind children, nieces and nephews. Her son smokes cigarettes - menthol brand of course. By the time he watched his mom die of lung cancer, he was addicted. He switched to e-cigarettes, thinking they were safer than cigarettes. We now know that that is not true.

Illnesses caused by tobacco/nicotine products are preventable. Connecticut Dept of Public Health says \$2.03 billion annual health care costs in Connecticut is directly caused by smoking. Let tackle this health issue by making it a bit harder to get started by banning flavored tobacco/nicotine products. Let’s try to lower the cost of health care in CT from smoking related illnesses. Let’s save lives. Let’s begin to tackle some of the issues that cause health disparities. Please support **of S.B. No. 326 (RAISED) PUBLIC HEALTH. “AN ACT PROHIBITING THE SALE OF FLAVORED CIGARETTES, TOBACCO PRODUCTS, ELECTRONIC NICOTINE DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND VAPOR PRODUCTS**