

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 to address my opposition to **Raised S.B. No. 326**, the proposed ban on flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, and how it will likely affect the communities my members our conference represent. It is my moral duty to examine prospective laws and ensure they will serve the greater good for our clergy members and church communities they are enforced upon.

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

The inclusion of menthol cigarettes in the proposed ban disproportionately affects African Americans and other communities of color. The inclusion of menthol in the proposed ban will disproportionately criminalize African American smokers - including adult smokers. The majority of the current U.S. cigarette market is comprised of non-mentholated cigarettes, which accounts for roughly 2/3 of the market. Menthol cigarettes only make up 1/3 of the current market, **yet 80% of African Americans in the U.S. who smoke cigarettes choose menthol cigarettes.** Thus, the proposed ban of menthol cigarettes disproportionately punishes and stigmatizes African American smokers.

A menthol ban includes unintended consequences on adults

Because many menthol users are African American adults, if the proposed ban were to include menthol cigarettes it would also create increased interaction between law enforcement and African American members of our community. As you understand this is quite concerning in the African American community, as we continue to fight for police accountability when working with Black and Brown people. 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 criminalize addiction.

Education not criminalization is the effective way to deter smoking

As demonstrated by the failed "war on drugs", the criminalization of victims who are battling an addiction is not only cruel it does not work! Numerous reports show that criminalizing addiction sets a dangerous obstacle to good treatment. The more effective way to decrease smoking among the youth and adults is to fund prevention and treatment programs.

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

Thank you,

Kimber