



**Testimony of Giovanna Mozzo  
Member, Connecticut Prevention Network and  
Director of The Hub; a division of RYASAP  
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, Senator Somers, Representative Petit and Members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Giovanna Mozzo and I am Director of The Hub; a division of Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership (RYASAP). We are the designated Regional Behavioral Health Action Organization (RBHAO) for Southwestern CT and a member of the Connecticut Prevention Network (CPN). CPN is the coalition of the five Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations who are focused on substance abuse and mental health prevention efforts.

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>i</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>ii</sup> Between 2010 and 2020, it was estimated that 2.3 million people would start smoking because of menthol cigarettes.<sup>iii</sup>

In 2018, the U.S. Surgeon General first called youth e-cigarette use an “epidemic.” Flavored e-cigarettes continue the tobacco industry’s long history of targeting kids with flavored products (i.e., cotton candy, bubble gum). The intention of flavored tobacco is to improve the taste and mask the harshness of tobacco products, making it easier for kids to try the product and ultimately become a repeat user. In addition to e-cigarettes, tobacco companies continue to target

kids with other flavored products, including cigars in hundreds of flavors, including menthol cigarettes.

Similar to national and state trends, vaping is increasing dramatically in SW CT:

- 14% to 23% of adults in the region have ever tried vaping, compared with 11% to 18% three years ago.
- The vaping prevalence is highest amongst teens, though data is not available for all communities. 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.
- The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey show that 28.7% of Connecticut high school students are current tobacco uses, 27.0% are current e-cigarette users, and of those current e-cigarette users, 31.5% are frequent users (use on 20+ days/month). Frequent use is a strong indication of addiction.
- [Research shows that flavors play a key role in youth use of tobacco products](#), including e-cigarettes. From 2019 to 2020, the proportion of current e-cigarette users using flavored e-cigarettes increased by twenty percent, from 68.8% to 82.9%. Nearly 3 million youth use flavored e-cigarettes, including over 1 million who use menthol-flavored e-cigarettes.

Recent national data suggest that the popularity of vaping is leading to an increase in cigarette smoking, reversing a decades-long drop. Teens who use vapes are 4 times more likely to smoke cigarettes.

This has long been recognized by the tobacco product industry, as for example, menthol cigarettes were marketed specifically to adolescents and racial minorities in the US.<sup>iv</sup>

Indeed, most youths who have ever used tobacco products began by using a flavored product.<sup>v</sup> It follows that flavoring is used by the tobacco product industry as a mechanism to increase sales and profitability.

In our role as members of the CPN, we provide indirect services relating to prevention of substance use issues. That includes collaborations with a wide variety of community coalitions and statewide organizations for educational initiatives, prevention strategies, and legislative advocacy. Community coalitions have recently been making efforts toward the prevention and cessation of vaping among youth in our region which is an important focus of our work.

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,

Giovanna Mozzo

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

<sup>iii</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>

<sup>iv</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.

<sup>v</sup> Ambrose BK, Day HR, Rostron B, et al. Flavored Tobacco Product Use Among US Youth Aged 12-17 Years, 2013-2014. *JAMA*. 2015;314(17):1871–1873. doi:10.1001/jama.2015.13802.

## Reference

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