



Cancer Institute

Testimony-CT Legislature Public Health Committee
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Members of the CT legislature's Public Health Committee,

Greetings, I am pleased to offer testimony to support **S.B. No. 326 (RAISED) AN ACT PROHIBITING THE SALE OF FLAVORED CIGARETTES, TOBACCO PRODUCTS, ELECTRONIC NICOTINE DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND VAPOR PRODUCTS**. I am the Medical Director of the Hartford HealthCare Cancer Institute at Hartford Hospital where I direct the Helen & Harry Gray Cancer Center. I am also proud to be a 40 year volunteer for the American Cancer Society. I also hold the academic rank of Clinical Professor at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine.

Tobacco remains the number one cause of preventable death and disease in the United States, killing nearly half a million Americans each year. No other consumer product has such a devastating impact. Flavored tobacco products are luring kids into a lifetime of addiction – which they otherwise may very well have avoided – we must do everything in our power to stop that. That means ending the sale of all flavored tobacco products.

Tobacco 21 is one part of a comprehensive strategy that helps reduce youth access to tobacco products and we truly appreciate the leadership and action of Connecticut leaders to pass that legislation in **2019**. Tobacco 21 was an important step in the right direction.

Flavors are what makes these products so appealing to youth and are driving the e-cigarette epidemic. Given how popular flavored e-cigarettes are among youth, if retailers are still allowed to continue selling them, kids will find ways to obtain them. Entirely removing these products from the market is the only way to curb their use by kids and create a tobacco-free generation.

Although this legislation may impact some adults who wish to have flavored products, the unflavored products will still be available for those adults who are attempting to quit cigarette smoking. On balance, the banning of flavored products will do more to enhance the public health approach in limiting product accessibility to kids and a lifetime of tobacco addiction.

The FDA introduced a policy which went into effect on February 5th, 2020, however it falls incredibly short of providing protections needed for public health. This newly implemented policy exempts all menthol flavored e-cigarettes and only restricts flavors in closed pod products, leaving flavored e-liquids

and very popular disposable vape pens in every imaginable flavor widely available. There are over 15,500 available e-cigarette flavors but since the **FDA's regulations** only addresses closed-pod products, the vast majority of these flavors are still available. Many of the most egregious kid-friendly flavors – like gummy bear, cotton candy, and s'mores – are still available.

The policy still allows for other flavored tobacco products to remain on the market. All menthol products remain available (we know that more than half of youth were already using menthol products). The **FDA** left all flavors of little cigars available as well; with flavors like cherry, peaches and cream or chicken and waffles, and packaged to be sold in small packs for under a dollar, these products are especially popular with kids.

Mint and menthol flavored products are a major contributor to the epidemic of use of these products by teens. There is no public health justification to exempt them from any policy proposal. A majority (57.3%) of youth e-cigarette users use mint or menthol flavored e-cigarettes and these flavors are only second in popularity to fruit flavored e-cigarettes. Among 10th and 12th grade Juul users, mint is the most popular flavor.

The CDC reports that 54 percent of youth who smoke use menthol cigarettes. The tobacco industry has targeted marketing of menthol products to those who are new to smoking. They have also manipulated menthol levels to make them more palatable to beginning smokers. Menthol helps mask the harshness of tobacco making it easier for young people to begin smoking.

Big Tobacco has a long history of aggressively marketing their flavored products to young people, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color, as well as among LGBTQ communities. Consequently, nearly 90% of African American adults who smoke and more than 70% of African American youth who smoke use menthol cigarettes. African Americans are more likely to die from tobacco-related causes than any other race or ethnic group in America. The CDC TPSAC's (Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee) report and FDA's analysis conclude that African Americans are disproportionately burdened by the health harms of menthol cigarettes.

Lung cancer is the second most common cancer in both African American men and women, but it kills more African Americans than any other type of cancer. Decreased cessation success due to the popularity of menthol cigarettes among African Americans likely contributes to this mortality disparity.

More than 43,000 Hispanics are diagnosed with a tobacco-related cancer each year and more than 18,000 die from a tobacco related cancer each year. 28.5% of Puerto Rican adults and 16.6% of Hispanic/Latino adults smoke cigarettes.

Here is some recent CT data: 3.7% of high school students smoke cigarettes. 5.7% of high school males smoke cigars. 27% of high school students use e-cigarettes, compared to 19% nationally. 12.1% of adults smoke cigarettes. 4,900 adults die each year in CT related to tobacco related disease. Smoking kills more people than alcohol, AIDS, car crashes, illegal drugs, murders, and suicides combined — and thousands more die from other tobacco-related causes — such as fires caused by smoking (more than

1,000 deaths/year nationwide) and smokeless tobacco use. The tobacco industry spends more than \$64M each year in CT on marketing.

This is really a public health issue of major proportion. Massachusetts became the first state to ban all flavors. We ask you to join MA in setting the pace nationally to keep our kids and our communities safe. The dollars lost from sales tax is far outweighed by the dollars we will save in health care costs and the toll on our families and communities.

Sincerely,

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