



February 17, 2021

Minnesota House Preventive Health Policy Division

Dear Chair Freiberg and Committee Members:

Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation is a coalition of more than 60 organizations working to reduce youth tobacco use and end tobacco's harm for good. We are united behind policies that reduce youth smoking and nicotine addiction, including ending the sale of menthol and all flavored tobacco products, and investing in tobacco prevention and treatment programs.

Our coalition supports HF904, which would end the sale of menthol and all flavored tobacco products in Minnesota. Removing flavored tobacco products from the marketplace is an important step to prevent youth addiction, improve lung health and encourage adults to quit.

Flavored tobacco products drive youth tobacco use, which remains at epidemic levels. More than eight in 10 youth who ever tried tobacco started with a flavored tobacco product, and seven in 10 youth say they use e-cigarettes "because they come in flavors [they] like." Today an estimated 3.6 million young Americans use e-cigarettes. The 2019 Minnesota Student Survey found 26 percent of 11th-graders and 11 percent of 8th-graders use e-cigarettes (a 54 percent and 95 percent increase, respectively, since 2016). We need an all-hands-on-deck approach to protect the next generation from lifelong tobacco addiction.

Menthol flavorings in particular give a cooling sensation and masks tobacco's harshness, making it easier to start smoking and harder to quit, especially among African American smokers. The tobacco industry has used menthol flavors to racially segment and target certain customers, especially Black Americans, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) communities, and youth.

For over six decades, the tobacco industry has deployed aggressive advertising in Black magazines and neighborhoods, and used other tactics designed to hook African Americans on menthol cigarettes. Today as a result of that targeting, 85 percent of Black smokers smoke menthols, compared to 29 percent of white smokers. The exclusion of menthol tobacco in a federal 2009 ban on flavored cigarettes has institutionalized these disparities and cost thousands of Black lives.

Clearing the market of all flavored tobacco products will create a healthier future for our kids and directly improve the health of communities targeted by Big Tobacco.

The COVID-19 pandemic adds urgency to our efforts, since current and former smokers are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. To make matters worse, communities targeted by the tobacco industry, including Black and Indigenous Minnesotans, are some of the hardest hit by COVID-19.

Our kids and our neighbors targeted by Big Tobacco need strong tobacco prevention policies that put public health ahead of tobacco industry profits. By ending the sale of flavored tobacco products, Minnesota can take steps to reverse the youth tobacco epidemic, address health disparities and reduce health care costs.

On behalf of Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation, we hope we can count on your support.

Sincerely,



Molly Moilanen
Co-Chair, Minnesotans for a
Smoke-Free Generation
Vice President, ClearWay MinnesotaSM



Janelle Waldock
Co-Chair, Minnesotans for a
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About Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation

Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation is a coalition of more than 60 organizations that share a common goal of saving Minnesota youth from a lifetime of addiction to tobacco. The coalition supports policies that reduce youth smoking and nicotine addiction, including increasing tobacco prices, ending the sale of menthol and all flavored tobacco products, and funding tobacco prevention and treatment programs.

Partners include: The African American Leadership Forum, Allina Health, Allina Health | Aetna, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, American Lung Association in Minnesota, Apple Tree Dental, Association for Nonsmokers – Minnesota, Aurora/St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation, Becker County Energized, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, A Breath of Hope Lung Foundation, Cancer Legal Care, CentraCare, Children’s Defense Fund-MN, Children’s Minnesota, ClearWay MinnesotaSM, Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio – CLUES, Dodge County Public Health, Education Minnesota, Essentia Health, Gillette Children’s Specialty Healthcare, A Healthier Southwest, HealthPartners, Hennepin Healthcare, Horizon Public Health, Indigenous Peoples Task Force, ISAIAH, JustUs Health, LAAMPP Alumni, Lake Region Healthcare, Local Public Health Association of Minnesota, LPCFC – Lincoln Park Children and Families Collaborative, March of Dimes, Masonic Cancer Center - University of Minnesota, Mayo Clinic, Medica, Meeker McLeod Sibley Community Health Services, Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians, Minnesota Association of Community Health Centers, Minnesota Cancer Alliance, Minnesota Council of Health Plans, Minnesota Dental Association, MHA – Minnesota Hospital Association, Minnesota Medical Association, Minnesota Nurses Association, Minnesota Oral Health Coalition, Minnesota Public Health Association, Minnesota Society for Public Health Education, MNAAP – Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, ModelCities, NAMI Minnesota, North Memorial Health, NorthPoint Health & Wellness, Olmsted Medical Center, Open Cities Health Center, PartnerSHIP 4 Health, Perham Health & Living, Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation, SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, ShiftMN, St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, Steele County Public Health, Tobacco-Free Alliance, Twin Cities Medical Society, UCare, Vision In Living Life – Change is Possible, WellShare International and Zumbro Valley Medical Society. Find out more at: smokefreegenmn.org.