

House Health Finance and Policy Hearing

Draft Testimony for LaTrisha Vetaw [2 mins]

March 23, 2021

Good afternoon. I'm LaTrisha Vetaw, Director of Health Policy and Advocacy at NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center in North Minneapolis. I'm also a Minneapolis Parks Commissioner. I support the new investments in tobacco prevention and treatment included in HF 2128.

As you know, last year the House passed a resolution calling racism what it is: a public health crisis. And the House Select Committee on Racial Justice recommended additional investments in tobacco control. For decades, Big Tobacco has targeted their deadly products by race. They market cigarettes, especially menthols, specifically to African American people . . . advertise in Black publications and neighborhoods, sponsor concerts. . . . They even used to drive around Black neighborhoods handing out free samples of menthol cigarettes.

When you consider this, it's no surprise African Americans have the highest death rate and shortest survival rate from most cancers. Black people are also 53 percent more likely to die from heart disease – the top smoking-related disease. COVID-19 also disproportionately affects the Black community and has worse effects on smokers. Combine these factors . . . you've got a recipe for a population-wide catastrophe.

I wish I could say I stand here alone, but I don't. Black people aren't the only ones hurt by cigarettes and other commercial tobacco products. In fact, my story is true for MANY targeted communities. NO QUESTION, greater addiction, disease and death permeate our communities because the industry markets and promotes tobacco products to us.

We can't let the tobacco industry continue addicting and harming the next generation. You have a great power, and I urge you to use it! Increase investments in youth tobacco prevention, treatment programs, community partnerships, research, and evaluation. Together, they will do what needs to be done: Disrupt the tobacco industry's grip of addiction . . . for my community, your community, and all the communities of our beautiful state. Thank you.