

February 18, 2020

Dear Members of the House Commerce Committee:

On behalf of Children's Minnesota, I am writing to express our support for House File 3032 which aims to reduce youth tobacco use by prohibiting the sale of all flavored tobacco products.

Children's Minnesota is the state's largest provider of pediatric health care. We see children from all 87 counties and approximately 60 percent of the counties in the surrounding states. The community of patients treated at Children's is incredibly diverse and we are acutely aware of the health inequities and disparities that exist within our community and between our kids.

A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control highlights the racial and ethnic disparities in the use of tobacco products among middle and high school students and notes that, often, specific racial and ethnic groups are targeted by the tobacco industry's advertising efforts. Studies have shown that this is especially true when it comes to marketing menthol flavored products.

Flavored tobacco products are a key contributor to Minnesota's youth nicotine epidemic. The most recent Minnesota Student Survey showed that 67 percent of high-school tobacco users reported using a flavored product and a recent national study has shown that more than 80 percent of youth who try tobacco reported starting with a flavored product. Research has shown that the developing teenage brain is particularly vulnerable to the addictive effects of nicotine and that youth who use a tobacco product, such as e-cigarettes, are more likely to go on to use other tobacco products. Local restrictions on flavored tobacco products have been shown to limit their availability and reduce the chance that youth will become habitual users.

Flavoring in e-liquids has been shown to be harmful when inhaled or vaped and can cause inflammation and damage to airway and lung tissue. Children's Minnesota has treated the majority of teens in the state with vaping related lung injuries including, severe lung damage and respiratory failure. For some of our patients, they may not fully recover. While vaping and flavored products have largely been marketed as a safer alternative to cigarettes, anyone who uses these products is still putting nicotine into their body. Besides being highly addictive, nicotine is also toxic in high doses. It affects the brain, nervous system and raises blood pressure and heart rate. In rare cases, when large doses of nicotine are involved, arrhythmia (abnormal heart rate) can cause heart failure and death.

Children's Minnesota vision is to be "every family's essential partner in raising healthier children;" that means both inside and outside our clinic walls. We look forward to working with you further to pass legislation and policies that ensure the health and well-being of our children.

Sincerely,

Kelly Wolfe
Director of Public Affairs and Advocacy