



February 12, 2021

Dear Chair Freiberg and Minnesota House Preventive Health Policy Division Committee Members:

JustUs Health works for equitable health care access and outcomes for people who experience injustice at the intersection of health status and identity. We encourage you to support **HF904**, which would end the sale of menthol and all flavored tobacco products in Minnesota. Removing flavored tobacco products from the marketplace is a key to preventing youth addiction, helping adults to quit, and ending corporate tobacco's shameful use of menthol to racially segment and target Black Americans, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) communities, and youth.

For over six decades, the tobacco industry has aggressively focused their menthol sales in Black magazines and neighborhoods and used other tactics in order to hook African Americans on menthol cigarettes. Today's numbers speak for themselves: 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.

After successfully marketing menthol to African Americans, the tobacco industry turned to LGBTQ and youth communities. Now, over 36 percent of LGBTQ smokers nationally smoke menthol cigarettes and nearly half (45 percent) of LGBTQ female smokers smoke menthols, compared to 34 percent of straight female smokers.

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

The COVID-19 pandemic adds urgency to our efforts. We know that communities targeted by the tobacco industry, including Black, Indigenous, and LGBT Minnesotans, are the same communities already experiencing some of our worst health disparities and now, they are some of the hardest hit by COVID-19.

Thank you for your leadership in promoting a healthy community and working to put the health of our kids and neighbors ahead of Big Tobacco 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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Hanson Willis", written over a white background.

Jeremy Hanson Willis
CEO