

February 18, 2020

Commerce Committee

Rep. Laurie Halverson, Chair  
Rep. Zack Stephenson, Vice Chair  
Rep. Tim O'Driscoll  
Rep. Andrew Carlson  
Rep. Greg Davids  
Rep. Raymond Dehn  
Rep. Steve Elkins  
Rep. Pat Garofalo  
Rep. Barb Haley  
Rep. Michael Howard

Rep. Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn  
Rep. Ron Kresha  
Rep. John Lesch  
Rep. Dave Lislegard  
Rep. Tim Mahoney  
Rep. Marion O'Neill  
Rep. Ruth Richardson  
Rep. Chris Swedzinski  
Rep. Brad Tabke  
Rep. Tama Theis

RE: HF 3032 (prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products)

Dear Chair Halverson and Committee Members:

I am writing to urge you to support **HF 3032**, which prohibits the sale of all flavored tobacco products in Minnesota.

As the largest health plan in Minnesota, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota is committed to improving the health of all Minnesotans, which is why we strongly support statewide policy change such as this bill.

Youth tobacco use in Minnesota increased for the first time in 17 years and much of that was due to a 50 percent increase in the use of e-cigarettes. This policy will have a direct impact on reducing youth access to these products.

The tobacco industry, which includes e-cigarette manufacturers, uses menthol, candy and fruit-flavored tobacco products to attract the next generation of smokers. Their targets are undeniably young people, but because of predatory marketing, they also attract African Americans, American Indians and LGBTQ individuals. Nine out of ten African American adult smokers use menthol tobacco, compared to 22 percent of white adult smokers.

In 2017, Blue Cross released a study showing that each year, smoking claims over 6,000 Minnesota lives and costs our state **\$7.5 billion** in health care costs and lost productivity. The staggering costs of tobacco in both health care costs and loss of life cannot be compared to the loss of profits for those who want to continue to sell these lethal products.

Despite recent action from the FDA, the tobacco industry is still able to sell flavored and menthol products to youth and other communities. Minnesota deserves a strong policy that can protect consumers and reduce health care costs.

I hope you will take this positive step toward making a smoke-free generation for all Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Steffen', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark Steffen, M.D., M.P.H.  
Vice President, Chief Medical Officer  
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota