

February 15, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives
Preventive Health Policy Division
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155



RE: HF 904
Flavored tobacco and tobacco related product sale or offer prohibited, and penalties authorized

Dear Chair Freiberg and Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of Tobacco-Free Alliance to express our support for HF 904 to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products in Minnesota. The Tobacco-Free Alliance is a nonprofit organization working in the Twin Cities to educate the public on the harms caused by commercial tobacco and nicotine, engage and empower youth to become tobacco prevention advocates, and support populations that have been disproportionately impacted by commercial tobacco harms, all with the goal to create and sustain tobacco-free communities.

Removing menthol and flavored tobacco from the marketplace is critical to lowering youth tobacco use rates especially as they continue to climb due to e-cigarettes. The 2020 National Youth Tobacco Survey results showed that 3.6 million U.S. youth are current e-cigarette users and more than 8 out of 10 youth users use flavored e-cigarettes. This problem has worsened with COVID-19 as youth are vaping to cope with the stress and anxiety of the pandemic. This information is concerning as early studies have found COVID-19 may be particularly dangerous for people with lungs weakened by tobacco use, including e-cigarettes.

Thousands of different sweet, candy-flavored, and menthol/mint flavored tobacco products are available, enticing youth with the taste and colorful packaging. Many sweet tobacco products are flavored with the same substances found in Kool-Aid and Jolly Ranchers. Menthol flavored tobacco products in particular make it easier for kids to start smoking and harder to quit because menthol cools the throat and masks the harshness of tobacco. The tobacco industry also specifically targets communities of color, low-income, and LGBTQ communities with menthol tobacco advertising and promotion. As a result, these communities are disproportionately harmed by tobacco.

We need to continue to do everything we can to protect the health of our young people. The House Preventive Health Policy Division has the opportunity to help prevent another generation from becoming lifelong tobacco users. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elyse Less".

Elyse Levine Less
Executive Director