

**SENT VIA E-MAIL**

February 15, 2021

Minnesota House Preventative Health Policy Division

Dear Chair Freiberg and Committee Members:

On behalf of Children's Minnesota, I am writing to support HF904, which would end the sale of menthol and all flavored tobacco products in Minnesota.

Children's Minnesota is the state's largest pediatric provider of health care. Last year, we saw over 135,000 patients. We are also one of the state's largest Medicaid providers with approximately forty-four percent of our patient population reported as Medicaid eligible in 2019. Children's Minnesota is committed to promoting a healthier future for our kids and addressing systemic racism. Removing all flavored tobacco products from the marketplace furthers both these goals. We are deeply concerned about the rising rates of tobacco use among Minnesota youth and the persistent high rates of tobacco use among African Americans, American Indians, members of the LGBTQ community and other diverse populations targeted by the tobacco industry.

Candy and mint flavors are extremely attractive to children and young adults, who are especially vulnerable to addiction. Last year, experts at Children's Minnesota found a cluster of cases of vaping-related severe lung injuries in teens and young adults. Despite these injuries and growing evidence of the health harms of e-cigarettes, thousands of flavored vapes remain on the market alongside flavored cigars and menthol tobacco products.

Kids in Minnesota know that cigarettes are bad for them, but there is a huge misperception about the dangers of e-cigarettes and other flavored tobacco products. The 2019 Minnesota Student Survey found that 76 percent of Minnesota 11<sup>th</sup>-graders said there is "no, slight, or a moderate risk to using e-cigarettes." That statistic shows we have a new generation of youth falling for the tobacco industry's marketing.

Research shows that flavored tobacco products are just as harmful and dangerous as their unflavored counterparts. In particular, menthol gives a cooling sensation and masks the harshness of tobacco, making it easier to start smoking and harder to quit, especially among African-American smokers who continue to be aggressively targeted by tobacco advertising campaigns.

The tobacco industry has studied our kids and figured out how to reach the next generation of customers. More than 80 percent of youth who ever tried tobacco reported starting with a flavored product, and youth who use e-cigarettes are more likely to go on to smoke combustible cigarettes in the future.

Title continued ...  
Page 2

Children's Minnesota applauds efforts in our state to address youth tobacco use and reduce health disparities. We hope we can count on your support for HF904 as we work together secure a brighter future for our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Christu". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Maria Christu  
Senior Vice President of Advocacy & Health Policy  
Chief Legal Officer  
Children's Minnesota