



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 326: An Act Prohibiting the Sale of Flavored Cigarettes, Tobacco Products, Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems and Vapor Products

**Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut
February 8, 2021**

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support for Senate Bill 326: An Act Prohibiting the Sale of Flavored Cigarettes, Tobacco Products, Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems and Vapor Products.

At Universal Health Care Foundation, we envision a health system that is accountable and responsive to the people it serves, and that supports our health, takes excellent care of all of us when we are sick, at a cost that does not threaten our financial security. We believe that health outcomes should not be affected based upon income, gender, race, language of preference, status, or geography. We support this bill because it takes necessary action to address the public health crisis of youth smoking and the disproportionate impact of smoking-related disease on Black Americans.

In December of 2018, the Surgeon General labelled youth e-cigarette use as a public health epidemic. Despite the common misconception that e-cigarettes are safer than traditional cigarettes, the toxic chemicals in e-cigarettes adversely impact youth brain development and can negatively affect cognition, impulse control, and attention.¹ In 2020, the National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS) found that in the past 30 days, 38.9% of high schoolers and 20.0% of middle schoolers had used e-cigarettes on at least 20 days. Of youth e-cigarette users, more than eight out of ten used flavored products.²

The tobacco industry has promoted smoking among youth through flavored products and advertisements that target youth. Flavored products reduce the harshness of tobacco products, making smoking easier and more desirable for new users, including children and youth. Tobacco products come in a multitude of kid-friendly flavors, including fruit flavors, candy flavors, and mint. E-cigarettes have moved beyond these more traditional flavors to cotton candy, banana split, and unicorn – with cartoon advertisements.³

Companies like JUUL use marketing campaigns that appeal to youth, using social media, hashtags, and advertisements featuring cool young adults. When pressed on this youth-friendly campaign, JUUL officials denied purposely marketing to teenagers, despite awareness that teenagers were using the product and evidence that JUUL officials intentionally targeted youth.⁴

Since the 1940's, tobacco companies have primarily focused advertising of menthol cigarettes to Black Americans. Menthol cigarette companies like Kool and Newport used Black celebrities in advertisements on television and magazines popular with Black Americans and associated their products with the Civil Rights Movement. These companies also donated millions a year to historically Black colleges and organizations like the NAACP and the National Urban League.⁵

In 2018, 84.62% of Black smokers, 49.97% of Hispanic smokers, and only 29.35% of white smokers primarily smoked menthol cigarettes. Further, 46.78% of smokers who live in poverty smoke menthol cigarettes compared to 35.78% of smokers living at least two times about the federal poverty threshold s.⁶ The Truth Initiative Young Adult Cohort Study found that 52% of new smokers between the ages of 18 to 24 years old began using menthol cigarettes. In this cohort, 93.1% of Black smokers began with menthol cigarettes compared to 43.9% of white smokers.⁷

Menthol cigarettes are associated with higher levels of dependence and lower levels of successful cessation than regular cigarettes, with menthol cigarette smokers having a 12% lower chance of successfully quitting than non-menthol cigarette smokers.⁸ Black Americans are more likely to die from heart disease and lung cancer than white Americans, both of which can be smoking-related.⁹

This bill is essential because it ends the sale of all flavored tobacco products and menthol cigarettes. Connecticut should have a policy to ban these products, like those enacted in Massachusetts, California, and over 100 localities across the country. The federal Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act (TCA) in 2009 banned flavored cigarettes, but the tobacco industry is still targeting youth through other flavored tobacco products. Menthol cigarettes create health disparities for Black Americans.¹⁰

Flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, have created a public health epidemic in the United States. We urge you to support this bill to ensure tobacco companies can no longer target children and Black Americans. Thank you.

¹ Office of the Surgeon General. (2018, December 18). *Surgeon General's Advisory on E-Cigarette Use Among Youth*.

<https://ecigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/documents/surgeon-generals-advisory-on-e-cigarette-use-among-youth-2018.pdf>

² Wang, T. W., Neff, L. J., Park-Lee, E., Ren, C., Cullen, K. A., & King, B. A. (2020). E-cigarette use among middle and high school students. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 69(37). <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/pdfs/mm6937e1-H.pdf>

³ Bach, L. (2021). *Flavored e-cigarettes hook kids*. Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0407.pdf>

⁴ Creswell, J. & Kaplan, S. (2019, November 23). How JUUL hooked a generation on nicotine. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/23/health/juul-vaping-crisis.html>

⁵ Gardiner, P. S. (2003). The African Americanization of menthol cigarette use in the United States. *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, 6(1), 55-65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14622200310001649478>

⁶ Delnevo, C. D., Ganz, O., & Goodwin, R. D. (2020). Banning menthol cigarettes: A social justice issue long overdue. *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, 22(10), 1673-1675. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ntr/ntaa15>

⁷ D'Silva, J., Cohn, A. M., Johnson, A. L., & Villanti, A. C. (2017). Differences in subjective experiences to first use of menthol and nonmenthol cigarettes in national sample of young adult cigarette smokers. *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, 20(9), 1062-1068. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ntr/ntx181>

⁸ Smith, P. H., Assefa, B., Kainth, S., Salas-Ramirez, K. Y., McKee, S. A., & Giovino, G. A. (2020). Use of mentholated cigarettes and likelihood of smoking cessation in the United States: A meta-analysis. *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, 22(3), 307-316. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ntr/ntzo67>

⁹ American Cancer Society. (2019). *Cancer facts and figures for African Americans, 2019-2021*. <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/cancer-facts-and-figures-for-african-americans/cancer-facts-and-figures-for-african-americans-2019-2021.pdf>

¹⁰ Bach, L. (2021). *States and localities that have restricted the sale of flavored tobacco products*. Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0398.pdf>