



ATTORNEY GENERAL WILLIAM TONG  
STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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

Chairman Steinberg, Ranking Member Petit, Chairwoman Daugherty Abrams, Ranking Member Somers, Ranking Member Hwang, and Honorable Members of the Public Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 326, *An Act Prohibiting the Sale of Flavored Cigarettes, Tobacco Products, Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems and Vapor Products*.

Two weeks ago, a bipartisan coalition of 23 state attorneys general called on the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ban menthol cigarettes. We asserted that such a move would benefit public health overall, decrease youth smoking, and help mitigate the harm these products bring to minority populations. But even if the FDA decides to ban menthol cigarettes, it will likely take years before regulations are finalized and implemented. We can't wait any longer to protect the health of Connecticut residents, especially our kids. Connecticut can be a leader by ending the sale of all flavored tobacco products – including menthol cigarettes, and flavored e-cigarettes, cigars and chewing tobacco.

Ending the sale of flavored tobacco products will have an enormous impact in reducing the number of people who die or suffer debilitating illness from tobacco use, significantly reducing the number of young people who become addicted to tobacco products, and reversing the youth e-cigarette epidemic.

As our nation fights a respiratory pandemic, we must do everything in our power to protect people's lungs. That means doing everything in our power to reduce smoking and vaping, among youth especially. The number of youth who use e-cigarettes is alarming ("epidemic" levels, say the nation's health experts) – and it's the flavored products luring them into addiction.

Surveys show that over 80% of kids who have ever used tobacco products started with a flavored product. With flavors like gummy bear and cotton candy, mint and menthol (stunningly, there are over 15,000 flavors available), it's no surprise kids are getting pulled in. And when a single Juul pod can contain as much nicotine as a full pack of cigarettes, it's no surprise that kids are getting addicted.

Nationally, nearly 3.6 million kids are using e-cigarettes. In Connecticut, more than 1 in 4 high school students use e-cigarettes. This e-cigarette epidemic has reversed decades of progress in reducing overall youth tobacco use. Even more alarming is that research shows that e-cigarette use increases the risk of smoking cigarettes.



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While e-cigarettes justifiably get a lot of attention, no other flavored product contributes more to the death and disease caused by tobacco use than menthol cigarettes. Menthol in cigarettes disguises the harsh flavor of tobacco, making it attractive for beginners who are experimenting, and increasing the likelihood of addiction. Menthol cigarettes remain a major barrier to smoking cessation and the reduction of smoking-related health conditions. About 50 percent of youth who smoke cigarettes start with and then use menthol cigarettes.

The scientific research shows that menthol is not only a starting point for youth, but that these products disproportionately affect communities of color and other groups, such as the LGBTQ community and those experiencing mental health challenges. Menthol cigarettes are a leading reason why tobacco use is the No. 1 preventable cause of death for Black Americans. Smoking kills 45,000 Black Americans each year, and lung cancer kills more Black Americans than any other type of cancer.

It's no accident that Black Americans and others identifying as minorities gravitate toward menthol cigarettes. It is a direct result of decades of marketing by the tobacco industry. Starting in the 1950s, the tobacco industry targeted minority communities with marketing for menthol cigarettes through sponsorship of community and music events, targeted magazine advertising, youthful imagery and retail marketing.

This targeting continues today: menthol cigarettes are still heavily advertised, widely available and priced cheaper in Black and other minority communities, making them more appealing. A treasure trove of research indicates that Black neighborhoods have a disproportionate number of tobacco retailers, pervasive tobacco marketing, and in particular, more marketing of menthol products. As a result of all this, 85 percent of Black smokers smoke menthol cigarettes (compared to just 29% of white smokers).

Many of our neighboring states have acted. Massachusetts has ended the sale of all flavored tobacco products while New York, New Jersey, and Rhode Island have banned flavored e-cigarettes. There are simply no compelling reasons why any of these flavored tobacco products should remain on the market in Connecticut. Ending their sale here once and for all will save thousands of lives and should be implemented immediately.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this important legislation, and should you have any questions for me or my office, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.