



October 16, 2019

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy & Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy & Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member Walden:

We write in support of prohibiting menthol cigarettes, which is a key part of the Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act (H.R. 2339). There is overwhelming scientific evidence that menthol cigarettes have had a profound adverse effect on public health. Removing them from the market would drive down tobacco use and the death and disease it causes, particularly among youth and African Americans.

Menthol cigarettes are popular with youth. Over half of youth smokers – and seven in ten African American youth smokers – smoke menthol cigarettes. Menthol cools and numbs the throat and reduces the harshness of tobacco, making it easier and more appealing for youth to start smoking. In 2013, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released a report finding that menthol cigarettes lead to increased smoking initiation among youth and young adults, greater addiction, and decreased success in quitting smoking. An FDA scientific advisory committee concluded, “Removal of menthol cigarettes from the marketplace would benefit public health in the United States.”

Smoking-related illnesses are the number-one cause of death in the African American community and claim the lives of approximately 45,000 African Americans each year. Menthol cigarettes are a major reason why. Eighty-five percent of all African American smokers smoke menthol cigarettes, which is a direct result of a decades-long marketing campaign by the tobacco industry aimed at the African American community. African Americans generally have higher levels of nicotine dependence as a consequence of their preference for mentholated cigarettes.

Estimates of the harm menthol cigarettes cause to African Americans are alarming. The FDA advisory committee found that the marketing and availability of menthol cigarettes increases the overall prevalence of smoking and reduces smoking cessation among African Americans. In 2011, it estimated that by 2020, 4,700 excess deaths in the African-American community will be attributable to menthol cigarettes, and over 460,000 African Americans will have started smoking because of menthol cigarettes.

Our organizations fully support the menthol prohibition in the Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act. It will protect public health and save lives. We look forward to working with you to advance this bill.

Sincerely,

Action on Smoking & Health  
African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council  
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association for Dental Research  
American Association for Respiratory Care  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network  
American College of Physicians  
American College of Preventive Medicine  
American Dental Education Association  
American Heart Association  
American Lung Association  
American Medical Association  
American Public Health Association  
American Society of Addiction Medicine  
American Society of Clinical Oncology  
American Thoracic Society  
Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights  
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health  
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses  
Big Cities Health Coalition  
Black Lives / Black Lungs

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids  
CATCH Global Foundation, Inc.  
Catholic Health Association of the United States  
ClearWay Minnesota  
Community Anti - Drug Coalitions of America  
Counter Tools  
Eta Sigma Gamma – National Health Education Honorary  
LUNgevity Foundation  
March of Dimes  
National African American Tobacco Prevention Network  
National Association of County & City Health Officials  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of School Nurses  
National Center for Health Research  
National Medical Association  
National Network of Public Health Institutes  
Oncology Nursing Society  
Prevent Cancer Foundation  
Respiratory Health Association  
Society for Public Health Education  
Society for Research on Nicotine & Tobacco  
Students Against Destructive Decisions

CC: House Committee on Energy & Commerce Members