



April 26, 2021

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As your administration considers a response to the upcoming court-ordered deadline regarding menthol cigarettes, I write today to urge you to take bold action by removing menthol cigarettes from the marketplace. Menthol cigarettes play a large role in attracting and addicting youth to cigarettes, and the tobacco industry has ruthlessly marketed menthol cigarettes to Black and Brown communities and other priority populations, resulting in huge health disparities.

This Thursday, April 29, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) must respond to a court-ordered deadline for a citizen petition regarding the removal of menthol cigarettes from the marketplace. The American Lung Association and other leading public health organizations filed this [citizen petition](#) in 2013 asking FDA to prohibit menthol as a characterizing flavoring in cigarettes. By moving forward with such a product standard, you have an historic opportunity to save lives, reduce health disparities and prevent another generation from becoming addicted to these deadly products.

As part of this action, the Lung Association urges you to direct FDA to take even more meaningful action and remove all flavored menthol products, including e-cigarettes, cigars and cigarillos from the marketplace. The tobacco companies will do everything they can to discourage people from quitting and ending their addiction. Instead, the industry will do everything it can to urge menthol users to switch to other menthol tobacco products instead of switching, thereby further risking their health.

Menthol was introduced to make the poison of cigarettes go down more smoothly. First added to tobacco in the 1920s and 1930s, menthol reduces the harshness of cigarette smoke and the irritation from nicotine. While the number of people smoking continues to decrease, the presence of menthol on the market continues to be a major public health issue. As of 2018, about 38% of all cigarette sales were menthol cigarettes, the highest rate since major tobacco companies were required to report this data. About half of youth smokers ages 12-17 smoke menthol cigarettes and this may facilitate a lifelong addiction.

The tobacco industry's predatory marketing tactics have resulted in a widening gap in health disparities associated with menthol cigarette use, as well as death and disease caused by tobacco use. In fact, 85% of Black American smokers, 48% of Hispanic smokers and 41% of Asian American smokers use menthol cigarettes compared to 30% of white smokers. Other vulnerable groups of individuals impacted by the tobacco industry's targeted marketing include the LGBTQIA+ community and young people. Data show, menthol cigarette use is more prevalent among the LGBT community at 49% compared to 40% among heterosexual individuals.

The 2009 Tobacco Control Act called for completion of a report on the public health impact of menthol cigarettes. The resulting report written by the FDA's Tobacco Products Scientific

Advisory Committee and released in 2011, had two primary conclusions: 1) that menthol cigarettes have an adverse impact on public health in the U.S.; and 2) that menthol cigarettes offer no public health benefits, compared to non-menthol cigarettes. It made the overall recommendation to FDA that **removing menthol cigarettes from the marketplace would be appropriate for the protection of public health** (emphasis added). An additional report on menthol conducted by FDA itself in 2013 reaffirmed these conclusions.

Scientific evidence indicates that menthol smokers are less likely than non-menthol smokers to successfully quit smoking despite having a higher urge to end their tobacco dependence. Research conducted in Canada regarding their prohibition of menthol cigarettes sales found that there was a large increase in the number of smokers who quit their tobacco addiction. It will also be vital for our nation's public health and medical systems to be ready to help everyone get the help they need to end their addiction for good.

Removing all menthol tobacco products from the marketplace would be the most significant action taken by any Administration since the FDA began its oversight of tobacco products in 2009. Ending the sale of all menthol flavored products from the marketplace will reduce health disparities, prevent young people from beginning a tobacco addiction and encourage tobacco users to quit. With 480,000 lives continuing to be lost to tobacco each year, the country can't afford to wait any longer to take this vital step.

Sincerely,



Harold P Wimmer
National President and CEO

Cc: The Honorable Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Health and Human Services
Dr. Janet Woodcock, Acting Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration
Mr. Mitch Zeller, Director, Center for Tobacco Products, Food and Drug Administration