

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

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 Cardiology 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