



March 1, 2023

The Honorable Ayanna Pressley
 U.S. House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Pressley:

We strongly support the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) proposals to prohibit the sale of menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars and ask you to support these efforts as well. FDA’s proposals will have a profound impact on reducing youth tobacco use, preventing tobacco-caused disease, and saving lives. It is time to put an end to the tobacco industry’s targeted efforts to use flavored products to lure youth into a lifetime of deadly addiction.

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the U.S., responsible for nearly one in five deaths each year. While smoking rates have declined, many communities continue to experience high rates of smoking and smoking-caused disease, including people with lower levels of income and education, individuals living in rural areas, Native Americans, people with a behavioral health condition, and the LGBTQ+ community. FDA has the tools to reduce the number of people who die of cancer, heart disease, respiratory disease, and other tobacco-caused diseases and should use them, including by finalizing its proposals to prohibit menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars.

Menthol cools and numbs the throat, which helps mask the harshness of tobacco smoke and makes it easier for young people to start smoking. Menthol cigarettes are also more addictive and harder to quit than non-menthol cigarettes. As a result, menthol cigarettes have increased the number of youth who smoke and the number of people who die prematurely from

smoking. Black communities, which have been the target of menthol cigarette marketing for decades, have been especially harmed by menthol cigarettes. Removing these products from the market would reduce the number of youth who become addicted to tobacco, save hundreds of thousands of lives, and advance health equity.

Cigars, which come in hundreds of kid-friendly flavors like Cherry Dynamite and Tropical Fusion, are the second most popular tobacco product among youth. In 2022, half a million youth were current cigar smokers. Every day that passes, more than 1,400 kids try cigar smoking for the first time and there is extensive evidence about the role flavors play in attracting youth to cigars. We need to protect kids from flavored cigars because cigar smoke is composed of the same toxic and carcinogenic constituents found in cigarette smoke and can cause cancer of the oral cavity, larynx, esophagus, and lung.

FDA should finalize these proposals quickly. We urge you to discourage any delays and reject any efforts by Congress to restrict the ability of FDA to move forward with these or other efforts to reduce tobacco use. Strong FDA action to reduce tobacco use is critical, as tobacco use continues to claim the lives of nearly half a million Americans every year.

Sincerely,

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Heart Association
American Lung Association
B.O.L.D. Teens (Breathe of Life Dorchester)
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
Codman Square Neighborhood Council
Dana Farber Cancer Institute
Health Resources in Action
Massachusetts Health Officers Association
Massachusetts Medical Society
Massachusetts Medical Society Alliance
Massachusetts Pharmacist Association
Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD)
The Worcester District Medical Society (A Division of the Massachusetts Medical Society)
YWCA Cambridge