



Dr. Anthony Williams,
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111 Colchester Avenue
Burlington, VT 05401

Chair Theresa Wood
House Human Services Committee, Vermont Legislature
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT

January 25th, 2024

Dear Chair Wood,

I am a family medicine physician with the Colchester Family Practice of the UVM Medical Center and I serve as the Assistant Dean of Admissions for the Larner College of Medicine at the University of Vermont. I have lived in Vermont for more than 11 years and have had the opportunity to connect with people of color both in my clinical capacity and active community endeavors.

I am writing to strongly urge the House Human Services committee to retain language in S.18 that would include menthol tobacco products on the list of flavored products to be banned. This would greatly benefit the health and welfare of Black patients across Vermont and would begin to undo the impact of the systemic racism that gave rise to the Black community being targeted for menthol products to begin with. There is copious medical data showing how lung function improves the sooner a person quits and continues to remain free of tobacco products.

I appreciate the thoughtfulness of the committee to ensure that Black Vermonters would not be inadvertently impacted by the ban. I understand the committee is struggling with the concern that individuals, especially those whose autonomy has been historically suppressed, could be disempowered by this ban. However, I see this measure as doing precisely the opposite. I come from a family of smokers and grew up in a predominantly Black community in New York City and saw first-hand how targeted advertising and easy accessibility of menthol tobacco products impacted those around me. The passing of my grandparents was directly influenced by the use of tobacco products. Instead of removing menthol tobacco products from the legislation, I would suggest instead that my fellow colleagues in health care and I use this legislation to foster conversations with community members about tobacco use and the pernicious, targeted impact it has had on people of color in particular. We would effectively be putting the autonomy back in the hands of people of color in the community through this collaborative process.

I want to be sure we are doing right for my community and this ban would be an important avenue and tool for supporting the health of Black Vermonters. If it would be helpful, I am happy to speak to your full committee about my recommendations.

Sincerely,

Anthony R. Williams, MD