



January 8, 2024

To: Madame Chair Wood & Members of the House Human Services Committee
From: Flavors Hook Kids Vermont Coalition
Re: Support S.18 to Ban the Sale of Menthol and Flavored Tobacco

Dear Madame Chair Wood & Members of the House Human Services Committee,

The Flavors Hook Kids Vermont Coalition urges you to support S.18, the bill to ban the sale of menthol and flavored tobacco in Vermont and prevent the addiction of the next generation of Vermont kids.

Our kids are in crisis. After the decades-long progress Vermont has made in reducing youth tobacco use, the tobacco industry is targeting our kids by using flavors to entice their use and fueling an epidemic.

The tobacco industry knows that 95% of adult smokers start by age 21 and they are using menthol and other flavored products to target our kids and addict new customers.

They know flavors hook kids. More than 8 in 10 youth who have ever used tobacco products started with flavored products. With 15,500 unique e-cigarette flavors, it's no surprise that 89% of youth e-cigarette users report using flavored products and say that flavored products are a key reason for their use.

The tobacco industry argues only older smokers use menthol cigarettes, yet the data shows young smokers, 12-17 year olds, are the highest users of menthol cigarettes.

Candy, fruit and menthol/mint flavored tobacco products are making the tobacco industry billions and are incredibly appealing to kids.

The 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows that even when students were learning remotely, and didn't have social interactions with other youth, still 23% of high school seniors in Vermont vaped and 30% did so daily, indicating likely addiction.

Even middle schoolers weren't immune with 7% of 8th graders vaping. Post-pandemic, school administrators are saying the problem has become even worse.

A UVMHC pediatrician reports her teenage patients say they use flavored nicotine-containing vapes every day within 5 minutes of waking up, continue to use them throughout the day, and it's the last thing they do before they fall asleep.

This is a social justice issue. Disparities in access to wealth, education, health care, housing, transportation, and social support contribute to higher tobacco use among many communities, including LGBTQ+ Vermonters, BIPOC, lower income Vermonters, and youth and young adults.

The tobacco industry heavily markets menthol cigarettes in these communities, further driving higher rates of tobacco use and resulting in huge disparities in health equity. This is the effect of predatory targeting, not preference.

There is no evidence that flavored tobacco products are healthier, nor used successfully for cessation. The evidence however does show that flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, are easier to smoke, more likely to addict youth and harder to quit.

Massachusetts passed legislation in November 2019 eliminating the sale of flavored and menthol tobacco products and it is working.

From 2019 to 2021, MA youth smoking rates decreased from 4.3% to 2.9% and youth vaping rates decreased from 32% to 17.6%. MA Adult cigarette smoking declined from 12.1% to 10.6% and retailers have not gone out of business.

Now is the time to act. Please protect our residents from the predatory tactics of the tobacco industry by ending the sale of flavored tobacco in Vermont.

All Vermonters deserve to be free from nicotine addiction in order to live a long, healthy life.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics Vermont Chapter

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

American College of Cardiology

American Heart Association

American Lung Association

Blue Cross Blue Shield

Boys & Girls Club of Greater Vergennes

Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids

Care Partners Adult Day Center
Central Vermont Medical Center
City of Winooski
Coalition for a Tobacco Free Vermont
Dad Guild
Greater Burlington YMCA
Interfaith Public Health Network
Lamoille Family Center/Healthy Lamoille Valley
Meeting Waters Vermont
Mosaic Vermont
Northwest Medical Center
Outright Vermont
Porter Medical Center
Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation/Tobacco 21
Prevention Works VT!
Recovery VT/The Vermont Association of Mental Health & Addiction Recovery
SHAPE Vermont
The Collaborative Prevention Coalition
Town of Weybridge
United Way of Addison County
United Way of Northwest Vermont
University of Vermont Children's Hospital
University of Vermont Health Network
University of Vermont Health Network Medical Group
University of Vermont Medical Center
Vermont Academy of Family Physicians

Vermont Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs
Vermont Association of Hospitals and Health Systems
Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility
Vermont Center for Cardiovascular and Brain Health
Vermont Dental Society
Vermont Medical Society
Vermont Moms
Vermont-NEA
Vermont Principals' Association
Vermont Public Health Association
Vermont School Boards Association
Vermont State School Nurses Association
Vermont State Youth Council
Voices for Vermont's Children
Windham NAACP
YMCA Alliance of Northern New England