

Hi,

My name is Wichie Artu. I'm a community health expert, and I currently hold the President's position at the NAACP of Windham County. I also got hooked on menthol cigarettes when I was 16.

I'm here to recommend our legislators to keep the menthol additive as one of the banned flavors in bill S.18.

Why ban flavors at all?

Compared to original tobacco, flavored cigarettes are:

- More addicting
- Worse outcomes for health disparities
- Specifically appealing to youth

These are not opinions; they are facts. Facts so convincing that the United States government banned flavored cigarettes in 2009 "to protect the public health of the U.S. population and create a healthier future" ([FDA](#)). All flavors except menthol.

Why consider menthol?

Menthol is also a flavor. According to the [FDA](#), it is more addicting, worse for health disparities, and appealing to vulnerable groups - especially youth of color:

- More than 50% of smokers 12-17 use menthol ([MD Anderson Cancer Center](#) 2018)
- More than 70% of Black smokers 12-17 use menthol([Gina Cuyler - VP of Health Equity @Univera Healthcare](#))
- 93% of black smokers 18 to 24 started with menthols ([Gina Cuyler - VP of Health Equity @Univera Healthcare](#)).

Why was it not banned in 2009?

In 1964, tobacco advertising to youth was banned; a substantially influential market for tobacco. Since then, the tobacco industry has strategically marketed people of color starting in 1964 to get to the current point:

- 37% of current tobacco sales are menthol flavors (compared to 16% in 1963) ([CDC](#))
- 85% of current BIPOC smokers smoke menthol ([Columbia Univ.](#)) (compared to 19% in 1963 - [USA Today](#))
- Since 1963, the tobacco industry has had a "...pattern of activity [that] continues today with expanded marketing strategies like supporting and providing sponsorship funding for events, supporting various Black leaders with financial support, discounting menthol

products in Black neighborhoods, and abundant advertising in stores frequented by Black communities," - [National NAACP](#)

The NAACP is not the only BIPOC-led organization that support banning menthol. The African-American Tobacco Control, and the Center for Black Health & Equity also support it - among others.

This existential threat is known by even our young BIPOC community. When I started to smoke, I was given a menthol cigarette. My friends would joke with me saying "they're the N** killer". You know what the N** word is referring to.

It is in the tobacco industries' interest to not lose 37% of its sales overnight, and they have (and continue to) use various lobbying tactics to do so.

Why should you pass a ban on the sale of menthol and other flavorings?

Menthol is part of our communities, not because we chose for it to be, but because it's been pushed on us by malicious advertisement campaigns. Keep in mind these tactics were started at a time when public bathrooms were legally still designated for "Whites Only".

We are in a current political climate where we have to make decisions between making "America Great Again" and repairing the harm done to us people of color by white folks in power. Let's finally move past the racial targeting of government policy. Promote equitable policy making and take action that will help us progress in addressing health disparities in our youth and our BIPOC community. I urge you, as a BIPOC community leader and community health expert in a mainly white state, to ban the sale of flavored tobacco including menthol.