



November 17, 2015

Dear Mayor Coleman and Members of the City Council:

I am writing on behalf of the American Indian Cancer Foundation, a non-profit organization which is dedicated to eliminating cancer and its impact on American Indian families. We encourage you to pass the ordinance that will increase the price of little cigars and cigarillos and keep flavored tobacco products out of stores kids visit.

Tobacco holds a sacred role in American Indian traditions. However, the use of commercial tobacco products has become rampant in our community and is causing a multitude of ill health effects. Low cost and flavored tobacco products are simply a strategy of the commercial tobacco industry to addict kids at a young age and ensure they have lifelong customers. A recent survey of American Indians in Minnesota revealed that nearly 60% of adults identified as smokers. This number is more than three times higher than the overall rate of smoking in Minnesota. Research shows that kids believe flavored tobacco products are less dangerous and less addictive than non-flavored tobacco. However, they are just as dangerous as cigarettes with the same health risks of cancer, heart disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

As a result of the high smoking rates, American Indians suffer disproportionately from the effects of tobacco use including higher than normal cancer rates. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in Minnesota and American Indians have the highest rates of lung cancer and lung cancer deaths in this state. With already high addiction and cancer rates, we need to assure that a new generation of smokers is not established.

I hope that St. Paul continues to be a leader in the state by creating policies that help keep our kids tobacco free. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Executive Director, American Indian Cancer Foundation

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