



*Protecting, Maintaining and Improving the Health of All Minnesotans*

October 10, 2017

City Council President Stark  
15 Kellogg Boulevard  
310 City Hall  
St. Paul, MN 55102

Dear President Stark:

Tobacco use is still the primary cause of preventable death and disease, claiming the lives of over 6,300 Minnesota adults annually and incurring \$3.2 billion annually in medical costs. Tobacco is still a problem and menthol-flavored tobacco threatens our collective goal of a smoke-free generation. Particularly disturbing is that menthol-flavored tobacco is the product of choice for nearly half of high school smokers and most adult African American smokers.

Menthol makes smoking more attractive and addictive, especially to youth. It's cool and minty flavor can mask the harshness of cigarette smoke, making it easier for kids to experiment. Even worse, youth who smoke menthol are more dependent on cigarettes and show stronger addiction to nicotine than those who smoke non-menthols.

Unfortunately, the dangers do not stop with our kids. Menthol makes it harder for adult smokers to quit for good. Research shows menthol users are more dependent on nicotine and have stronger cravings making it harder for them to quit than people who smoke non-menthol.

Despite the harms, it is no surprise that menthol products are the favorite for so many kids and minority populations. Tobacco industry marketing practices are targeted at younger people and African American communities more than other population groups. Menthol cigarette marketing has consistently targeted minority and low-income communities, resulting in higher smoking rates among these groups.

A recent local survey conducted by the Minnesota African American Leadership Forum of over 400 African American residents in the metro area powerfully reinforces the need to address these harms. Most survey respondents think tobacco use is a significant public health threat; most, including two-thirds of surveyed smokers support more laws to reduce the harms of smoking; and, over two thirds of surveyed smokers believe menthol makes it easier for youth people to start smoking.

I am also attaching a Letter of Evidence from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on the health harms of flavored menthol tobacco. Of note on page four, CDC cites an FDA Advisory Report that concludes: *"...that less established smokers were more likely to smoke menthol cigarettes, that the availability of menthol cigarettes increases experimentation and regular smoking, and that the availability of menthol increases the likelihood of addiction for youth smokers."*

We need to do all we can to support a smoke-free generation, and the evidence is clear that menthol-flavored tobacco is a serious threat to our youth, African Americans and other populations disparately impacted by the health related harms of tobacco.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward P. Ehlinger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Edward P. Ehlinger, MD, MSPH  
Commissioner

[www.health.mn.gov/menthol](http://www.health.mn.gov/menthol)

Enclosures:

CDC Letter of Evidence

Cc: St. Paul City Councilmembers  
Mayor Christopher Coleman