

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota

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September 15, 2017

Mayor Chris Coleman
Members of St. Paul City Council
City of Saint Paul
310 City Hall
15 Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55102

Dear Mayor Coleman and Honorable Members of City Council:

I am writing to urge you to support the proposed ordinance to restrict menthol-flavored tobacco products to adult-only tobacco stores.

As the largest health plan in Minnesota, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota is invested in improving the health of all Minnesotans, which is why we strongly support local policy change to dramatically reduce access to menthol-, as well as candy- and fruit-flavored tobacco products.

Because of deliberate and sophisticated marketing from the tobacco industry, youth, African Americans and LGBTQ people smoke at disproportionately higher rates than the general population and a majority of them use menthol tobacco products. The addition of menthol makes it easier to start and more difficult to quit.

Earlier this year, Blue Cross released a study showing that each year, smoking claims over 6,000 Minnesota lives and costs our state \$3.19 billion to treat smoking-related diseases. That equates to \$593 for every adult and child in Minnesota. The number of deaths is equal to eliminating an entire small Minnesota town. By passing this ordinance, you will help keep every Saint Paul resident from a lifetime of addiction, illness and, in some cases, premature death.

I hope you will take this positive step toward making a healthier Saint Paul.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anika Carter Ward'.

Anika Carter Ward
Director, Center for Prevention
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota