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December 18, 2015

Mayor Chris Coleman
15 Kellogg Blvd. West
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Mayor Coleman:

Re: Opposition to Proposed Tobacco Flavor Ordinance

On behalf our constituents, the National Black Chamber of Commerce® is writing in opposition to a proposed ordinance that would prohibit the sale of flavored tobacco products in the vast majority of the City's retail outlets, excluding those products with tobacco, menthol, mint or wintergreen flavors. To make a bad proposal worse, minority-owned convenience stores who responsibly sell vapor products like ecigarettes will be penalized while unregulated vape shops who sell kid flavored ecigs can continue to operate unfettered, thereby doing even more damage to the convenience stores owned by our members.

This misguided proposal, unwarranted from the standpoint of public health, will hurt our retailer members and cost jobs. I strongly urge you to oppose it.

The National Black Chamber of Commerce is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nonsectarian organization dedicated to the economic empowerment of African-American communities. Nationally our organization includes 64,000 affiliate members in 188 chapters, including Minnesota.

The proposal appears designed to reign in the growth in recent years of flavored electronic cigarettes. However, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) plans to regulate electronic cigarettes under the Tobacco Control Act. The FDA, which has established scientific expertise, is the appropriate agency to study this issue, reach scientific conclusions and then regulate the products.

Overly restrictive local regulations, such as this proposed ordinance, could in fact have unintended consequences: it could help keep smokers smoking. New flavors move smokers

farther away from ones they associate with their old smoking habit, becoming an alternative to combustible cigarettes. Restrictions on flavored products could send the entirely wrong message. It could have the adverse effect of deterring adult smokers from switching to non-combustible products.

The proposal would have an additional unintended consequence. It will hurt retailers, including our members who own or work in stores that sell these products. The absence of flavored electronic cigarettes would result in lost revenue for the affected storeowners and retailers, as well as lost tax revenue to the city. This plan will simply shift those products to certain favored stores or to neighboring cities.

For these reasons, the National Black Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of its members, opposes adoption of this ordinance. We respectfully request that a vote on this bill be delayed until the FDA regulatory process is completed. In lieu of such a delay, we respectfully request that you vote no on this measure.

Thank you for your time and attention to our concerns.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harry C. Alford". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "H" and a long, sweeping underline.

Harry C. Alford
President/CEO