



Advancing Health Equity

November 5th, 2015

Members of the Saint Paul City Council
15 W Kellogg Blvd #310
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Council President Stark and Members of the Saint Paul City Council:

I am writing on behalf of Rainbow Health Initiative to express our support for the proposed ordinance that would restrict the sale of flavored tobacco products to adult-only tobacco shops. Rainbow Health Initiative is committed to advancing the health and wellness of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) communities through research, education and advocacy.

Each year, the tobacco industry spends millions of dollars targeting communities of color, low-income communities, and LGBTQ communities in Minnesota. Tobacco products are heavily marketed at LGBTQ events, in magazines and even on television. This marketing is paying off as LGBTQ students and adults are using tobacco at alarming rates. The 2014 Minnesota Youth Tobacco Survey revealed that bisexual and gay/lesbian students in 11th grade reported exceptionally high tobacco use rates, 37.1 percent and 29.2 percent respectively.

Flavored tobacco products mask the harshness of tobacco and assure that youth become addicted to tobacco products at a young age. Flavored tobacco, in combination with heavily targeted marketing, provides a pathway into addiction. As a result of our community's disproportionately high tobacco usage rates, LGBTQ health outcomes are also affected. Adult LGBTQ Minnesotans smoke at twice the rate of the general population, and that starts in youth. Rainbow Health Initiative believes that policies restricting the sale of flavored tobacco products will aide in reducing the high nicotine addiction rates and result in better health outcomes for our community.

We urge Saint Paul to continue to be a leader in promoting a healthy community by keeping tobacco out of the hands of our young people. By taking these products designed to get children using tobacco out of stores youth visit daily, Saint Paul will help prevent another generation from becoming lifelong tobacco users.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Dylan Flunker
Research & Policy Manager