

October 16, 2018



The Honorable Melvin Carter and members of the Saint Paul City Council
15 Kellogg Blvd. West, 310 City Hall
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Re: Letter in opposition to Little Grocery Store variance

Dear Mayor Carter and members of the Saint Paul City Council:

I am writing to express our opposition to the variance granted by the BZA to Little Grocery located at 1724 University Avenue West. Tobacco-Free Alliance was one of the organizations that collaborated to pass Saint Paul's menthol ordinance. Little Grocery is attempting to circumvent the menthol ordinance and undermine the intent of Saint Paul's tobacco shop distance requirements under the guise of economic hardship.

First, a variance request must meet a number of requirements to be granted. Little Grocery cannot satisfy these requirements. For example, Little Grocery's owner claimed he is seeking the variance solely for economic reasons. As per a recent newspaper interview with him: "His convenience store, which he recently closed, wouldn't be profitable if he cannot sell menthol-flavored tobacco products." [Little Grocery seeks variance](#) "Economic considerations alone" cannot be used to establish the need for a variance. It is also relevant to note *that he has already closed his store* and the menthol ordinance does not even go into effect until November 1st. Second, the 2011 tobacco shop ordinance limiting the number of tobacco shops was intended to discourage tobacco use, particularly among youth, and to prevent oversaturation of this type of business.

Please do not undo all of the community's hard work to protect its members from the harms of menthol tobacco, and please follow the zoning distance requirements put in place more than six years ago. Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elyse Less".

Elyse Levine Less
Executive Director, Tobacco-Free Alliance