

**Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota**

P.O. Box 64560  
St. Paul, MN 55164-0560  
(651) 662-8000 / (800) 382-2000



November 16, 2018

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

Re: Appeal file # 18-122975 – 589 Dale Street North

Dear Honorable Council Members:

I am writing to urge you to deny the appeal to reject the zoning variance request to the above applicant. We agree with the staff recommendation and support the decision made by the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) by a unanimous vote. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota was one of 57 organizations that supported the passage of the menthol tobacco restriction ordinance that went into effect on November 1. A zoning variance for this business undermines the aim of the ordinance – to limit access of tobacco by youth, who are especially vulnerable to exposure to these addictive products.

As the largest health plan in Minnesota, Blue Cross is committed to improving the health of all Minnesotans, which is why we strongly support local policy change to keep youth away from the harms of tobacco.

St. Paul City Council was very cognizant of the potential ways retailers could work around the menthol ordinance and have passed a cap on the number of tobacco shop licenses as well as the tobacco shop zoning code. City Council also recently voted to amend City Code to restrict unaccompanied minors under the age of 21 from entering liquor stores where menthol tobacco can still be sold. These ordinances and measures reflect the clear commitment of the City Council and the residents they represent to put the health of the community above commercial tobacco profits.

You have probably heard about the potential economic losses that the retailers claim to face. However, according to a 2017 Blue Cross report, smoking costs Minnesotans **\$7.5 billion annually** in excess health care costs and lost productivity. The staggering costs of tobacco in both health care costs and loss of life cannot be compared to the loss of profits for those who want to continue to sell these lethal products.

I hope you will take this positive step toward making a smoke-free generation for St. Paul youth and deny the appeal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Janelle Wilder'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Vice President, Community Health and Health Equity  
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota  
Co-chair, Minnesotans for a Smoke-free Generation  
[smokefreegenmn.org](http://smokefreegenmn.org)

[bluecrossmn.com](http://bluecrossmn.com)