



Advancing Health Equity

September 8, 2017

Dear Members of the St. Paul City Council:

I am writing on behalf of Rainbow Health Initiative, an organization that is committed to advancing the health and wellness of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) communities through research, education and advocacy. As a member of the St. Paul community, we encourage you to support the proposal that will ensure menthol tobacco products aren't sold in stores youth visit.

Each year, the tobacco industry spends millions of dollars targeting the LGBTQ community 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 2016 Minnesota Student Survey revealed that 70% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students who smoke, smoke menthol cigarettes. 36% of adult LGBTQ smokers use menthol products, compared to 29% of heterosexual adult smokers.

Menthol tobacco products mask the harshness of tobacco and assure that youth become addicted to tobacco products at a young age. Menthol 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. Rainbow Health Initiative believes that policies such as the one you are considering will aide in reducing the high nicotine addiction rates and result in better health outcomes for our community.

We urge the City Council to continue to be a leader in promoting a healthy community by keeping tobacco out of the hands of our young people. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Morgen Sedlacek
Shift MN Program Specialist
Rainbow Health Initiative