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September 6, 2017

The Honorable Mayor Christopher Coleman & Members of the St. Paul City Council
310 St. Paul City Hall,
15 W Kellogg Blvd
St. Paul, MN 55102

Dear Mayor Coleman and Members of the City Council:

On behalf of the 24,500 employees at HealthPartners, almost a third of who work in the city of St. Paul, we want to express our strong support for the proposed ordinance to restrict the number of places that can sell tobacco products that contain menthol flavoring. As you may know, it is HealthPartners' mission to improve health and well-being in partnership with our members, patients and the community.

Almost 90% of smokers become addicted to tobacco before the age of 18. Menthol gives a cooling sensation that masks the harshness of tobacco which makes it easier for young people to start smoking. Menthol cigarette use among Minnesota high school smokers has more than doubled since 2000. In fact, almost half (44%) of Minnesota high school smokers now use menthol cigarettes compared to 22% of Minnesota adult smokers.

To make matters worse, research shows that menthol makes tobacco harder to quit. This further deepens the harm caused by tobacco and worsens health disparities. Thanks to decades of tobacco industry targeting, African Americans, Native Americans, and LGBTQ people smoke menthol cigarettes at higher rates than other groups and are also more likely to suffer and die from smoking-related diseases.

St. Paul has long led the state on tobacco issues. Now is the time to apply that same standard to menthol tobacco. In doing so, you will help our young people lead healthier lives, free from the struggles of tobacco addiction, and reduce future health care costs, a top concern for every individual and business in the state. We hope that you will support this measure so that we continue to do what's best for our children.

Thank you for you for continuing to be a leader in our state and taking a positive step towards keeping tobacco out of the hands of our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Kottke MD".

Dr. Thomas Kottke, M.D.
HealthPartners Medical Director, Well-being