



The African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council

390 Fourth Street, San Francisco, California 94107 Telephone: 1-888-881-6619

Monday, September 11, 2017

The Honorable Chris Coleman and Members of the St. Paul City Council
15 Kellogg Blvd. West, 310 City Hall
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Mayor Coleman and Council Members:

The African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council (AATCLC) wholeheartedly supports the proposal before the City Council to restrict the sale of menthol products in the City of Minneapolis. This proposed ordinance can be an important step forward for public health, since we know that 80% of youth aged 12-17 start smoking with flavored and menthol cigarettes (Ambrose et al., 2015). Moreover, menthol allows for deeper inhalation and greater nicotine intake, thus making menthol cigarettes harder to quit compared to other cigarettes (Ton et al., 2015; Levy et al., 2011). The “cool refreshing taste of menthol” heralded by the tobacco industry is just a guise; bottom line, menthol allows the poison to go down easier!

Restricting the sale of menthol products also addresses the social injustice associated with the tobacco industry’s targeted marketing in marginalized communities. For example, tobacco companies place more menthol advertising, larger signage and cheaper menthol cigarettes in African American communities compared to other communities (Henriksen et al., 2011; Seidenberg et al., 2010). Restricting the sale of these products would be a major step toward eliminating tobacco-related disparities.

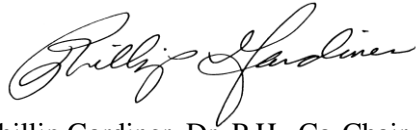
The AATCLC was involved in the initial discussions in St. Paul and Minneapolis about the harms of menthol tobacco products. In 2015, we participated in community conversations with elected officials, community members, faith leaders, and other African American community leaders. These conversations focused on the ways tobacco products, especially those with menthol flavoring, harm the African American community. Even though the Council did not include menthol cigarettes in its flavored tobacco restrictions at that time, the Council now has the opportunity to right this oversight and treat menthol cigarettes in St. Paul like all other flavored tobacco products by restricting their sale to adult-only tobacco outlets. While AATCLC’s focus has been mainly on the Black community, we recognize that menthol products are also disproportionately used by women, the LGBTQ community, Puerto Ricans, Native Hawaiians, Filipinos, and people with behavioral health issues (CDC, 2010; Fallin, 2015; Delnevo, 2011; Hawaii State Dept. of Health, 2009; Euromonitor, 2008; Hickman, 2015).

Formed in 2008, the African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council is composed of a cadre of dedicated community activists, academics, and researchers. Though based in California, we have a national scope and reach. We have partnered with community stakeholders, elected officials, and public health agencies to inform the national direction of tobacco control policy, practices, and priorities, especially as they affect the lives of Black Americans, African immigrant populations, and ultimately, all smokers. The AATCLC has been at the forefront in elevating the regulation of mentholated and other flavored tobacco products on the national tobacco control agenda, including testifying at the FDA hearings to remove menthol products from the market place.

The AATCLC applauds the City Council for taking up this most important issue facing the public health of your city. The City of St. Paul has an opportunity to join other cities like San Francisco and Oakland, California and to address tobacco-related health disparities by passing the proposed menthol restriction ordinance.

We are counting on you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Phillip Gardiner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Phillip" being more prominent than the last name "Gardiner".

Phillip Gardiner, Dr. P.H. Co-Chair AATCLC

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Carol O. McGruder". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name "Carol" and the last name "McGruder" being clearly legible.

Carol McGruder, Co-Chair AATCLC

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dr. Valerie Yerger". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name "Valerie" and the last name "Yerger" being clearly legible.

Valerie Yerger, N.D., Co-Chair AATCLC