



Health Department

March 21, 2023

Representative Nosse, Chair
House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care
900 Court St. NE - HR A
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB 3090 - Prohibiting selling flavored tobacco products

Chair Nosse, Vice-Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, and Members of the Committee, my name is Jessica Guernsey and I am the Public Health Director and Local Public Health Administrator for Multnomah County. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 3090.

The tobacco industry for too long has used myriad tricks to convince a new generation of youth to start using their addictive product. Tobacco use continues to be the main driver of death and disease in the United States and in Oregon. Every day, 22 Oregonians die because of tobacco use¹. This means that every day the tobacco industry needs to find new youth customers to keep their business moving forward. The introduction of menthol cigarettes a couple of generations ago has proved a devious way to coax young smokers. That experiment has proven to be very effective for the tobacco industry, and devastating to the African-American, LGBTQ, and Hispanic/Latino communities to whom menthol cigarettes are heavily marketed².

Starting in the last decade, a new wave of products and flavors has arrived through little cigars and inhalant delivery systems. As a result, our youth use of tobacco products has returned to levels not seen for a generation with 1 in 6 of all high schoolers currently using a tobacco product, most often a vape device³. Allowing the next generation to fall into a lifetime of addiction to nicotine is unacceptable. We must interrupt the recruitment of new youth tobacco users, as doing so will save many lives. With 85% of youth using a flavored product, the removal of flavors promises to interrupt youth initiation of tobacco products. Research shows that menthol as an additive to tobacco makes it harder to quit, and removing menthol cigarettes from the market helps people to quit⁴.

¹ <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/preventionwellness/tobaccoprevention/pages/oregon-tobacco-facts.aspx>

² https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/menthol/related-health-disparities.html

³ <https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/youth-and-tobacco/results-annual-national-youth-tobacco-survey>

⁴ <https://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/early/2021/07/01/tobaccocontrol-2021-056596.full>

We absolutely can end the epidemic of commercial tobacco, the leading cause of death that for decades has taken our parents, teachers, neighbors, friends far too early.

This is why we are so adamant about this issue, having ourselves adopted a local ordinance to eliminate flavored tobacco sales in Multnomah County. While we wait for challenges to this issue to clear, we anticipate that the will of the people and our stand for health equity will prevail. While Washington County and Multnomah County youth will soon be protected from flavored addictive nicotine, children all over the rest of the State of Oregon will not be protected from the #1 cause of death and disability. The impacts of prohibiting flavored tobacco could not be more pronounced, and taking a side on this issue could not be more clear. We implore you to join more than 350 communities across the nation, as well as a handful of countries, tribal nations, and several U.S. states, in prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco in our communities.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you,

Jessica Guernsey, MPH
Public Health Director
Multnomah County Health Department
