



Public Health Committee

Public Hearing – March 6, 2020

HB 5020 AA Implementing the Governor’s Budget Recommendations Regarding Public Health

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American Heart Association

The American Heart Association, the world’s leading health organization focused on heart and brain health for all, appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on HB 5020 An Act Implementing the Governor’s Budget Recommendations Regarding Public Health.

The American Heart Association (AHA) maintains that flavored tobacco products are reversing decades of progress in reducing tobacco use among youth and worsening the persistent disparities regarding addiction among communities of color. We appreciate the Governor taking steps within this bill to eliminate the sale of all flavored electronic cigarette products. **However, this bill does not go far enough, and we have serious concerns that focusing solely on flavored electronic cigarettes could lead youth and young people to switch to flavored cigars, menthol cigarettes or other flavored tobacco products that are left on the market. In addition, this proposal would further perpetuate the disparities and health equity gaps facing many of our communities. For these reasons, the AHA opposes this bill as written.**

We hope to work with Public Health Committee and legislative leaders on a comprehensive proposal that addresses ALL flavors, ALL products, such as SB 76 AA Prohibiting The Sale Of Flavored Cigarettes, Tobacco Products, ENDS And Vapor Products, which also is before this committee.

For purposes of historical context, last session the Public Health committee voted 20-1 to pass HB 7200 (Tobacco 21) with the following language: “No distributor or dealer shall sell, offer for sale, display for sale or possess with intent to sell any flavored cigarette or flavored tobacco product...” What has changed?

There is overwhelming evidence that fruit, candy and mint flavors are luring children and adolescents and fueling nicotine addiction in the next generation. Flavored tobacco products like gummy bear and cotton candy e-cigarettes or chocolate and mixed berry cigars are heavily marketed online, in convenience stores and gas stations and any place that sells tobacco products, attracting the eyes of youth. As the use of products like e-cigarettes has increased, so has the number of flavors offered.ⁱ There are literally thousands of flavors available on the market and it is no coincidence that the number of children and adolescents who use these products has increased dramatically. Data from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health found that 81 percent of youth age 12-17 and nearly 86 percent of young adults age 18-24 who have used a tobacco product say that the first tobacco product they ever used was flavored.ⁱⁱ

Menthol cigarettes pose a tremendous public health threat. A 2013 FDA report on the health impact of menthol cigarettes determined that menthol cigarettes lead to increased smoking initiation among youth and young adults, greater addiction and decreased success in quitting smoking.ⁱⁱⁱ Prevalence of menthol use is highest among African Americans – 85 percent of all African American smokers smoke menthol cigarettes, compared to 29 percent of Whites.^{iv}

Youth smokers are more likely to use menthol cigarettes than any other age group – over half (54 percent) of youth smokers ages 12-17 use menthol cigarettes, compared to less than one-third of smokers ages 35 and older.^v Prevalence of menthol use is even higher among African American youth – seven out of ten African American youth smokers smoke menthol cigarettes.^{vi} This leads to health disparities with African Americans suffering the greatest burden of tobacco-related mortality of any racial or ethnic group in the United States.^{vii}

We must put a stop to these alarming trends. The AHA stands ready to work with the Governor, this committee, and the entire CT legislature, to find permanent solutions that will protect Connecticut’s youth and residents from a lifetime of tobacco and nicotine addiction. It is critical that our state leaders embrace a comprehensive approach that includes: eliminating the sale of ALL flavored tobacco products; adequately funding tobacco prevention and cessation initiatives; and levying a tax on electronic cigarettes and other tobacco products that is on par with the state’s cigarette excise tax.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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Attachment: American Heart Association POLICY AT-A-GLANCE: Eliminating Tobacco Flavors

ⁱ Dai H and Hao J. Flavored Electronic Cigarette Use and Smoking Among Youth. *Pediatrics*. 2016;138

ⁱⁱ Villanti AC, Johnson AL, Ambrose BK, Cummings KM, Stanton CA, Rose SW, Feirman SP, Tworek C, Glasser AM, Pearson JL, Cohn AM, Conway KP, Niaura RS, Bansal-Travers M and Hyland A. Flavored Tobacco Product Use in Youth and Adults: Findings From the First Wave of the PATH Study (2013-2014). *Am J Prev Med*. 2017;53:139-151.

ⁱⁱⁱ FDA. Preliminary Scientific Evaluation of the Possible Public Health Effects of Menthol versus Nonmenthol Cigarettes (2013).

^{iv} Villanti, A., et al., “Changes in the prevalence and correlates of menthol cigarette use in the USA, 2004–2014,” *Tobacco Control*, published online October 20, 2016.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} HHS, “Tobacco Use Among US Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups—African Americans, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics: A Report of the Surgeon General,” 1998, http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/1998/complete_report/pdfs/complete_report.pdf.