

A-17



December 16, 2019

The Honorable Steve Lavagnino
Santa Barbara County
511 East Lakeside Parkway
Santa Maria, CA 93455

RE: # Elimination of Flavored Tobacco Sales

Dear Chair Lavagnino and Members of the Board:

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) is committed to protecting the health and well-being of the residents of Santa Barbara County through evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem. ACS CAN supports efforts to reduce youth tobacco use in Santa Barbara County by amending your current tobacco retail license. Tobacco retail licensing that also eliminates the sale of all flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, and prohibits coupons and discounting, sets a minimum price for all tobacco products, and restricts new licenses near schools are important components of a comprehensive approach to preventing youth from ever beginning a deadly addiction to tobacco.

Smoking remains the leading preventable cause of death in the U.S. The 2014 U.S. Surgeon General's report found that more than 43 million Americans still smoke. It is estimated that tobacco use will cause 480,000 deaths this year in the U.S. A strong tobacco retail license is an effective way to help reduce youth access to tobacco products. Both opponents of smoking and purveyors of cigarettes have long recognized the significance of adolescence as the period during which smoking behaviors are typically developed. National data show that about 95 percent of adult tobacco users begin smoking before the age of 21, and most begin with a flavored product.

In 2009, Congress prohibited the sale of cigarettes with flavors other than tobacco or menthol. Tobacco companies responded by expanding the types of non-cigarette tobacco products they offer, and now make most of those products available in a growing array of kid-friendly flavors. Little cigars, smokeless tobacco, hookah, and e-cigarettes are marketed in a wide variety of candy flavors with colorful packaging and deceptive names that appeal to youth.

Adolescents are still going through critical periods of brain growth and development and are especially vulnerable to the toxic effects of nicotine. A study published in the journal,

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
99 S. Lake Avenue, Suite 400 ■ Pasadena, CA 91101
626.243.5614 ■ FAX: 626.568.2888 ■ Primo.Castro@Cancer.org

Pediatrics, found that the earlier youth are exposed to nicotine, the less likely they will be able to quit smoking. Tobacco companies have a long history of marketing to vulnerable populations, and target youth with imagery and by marketing candy and fruit flavored tobacco. The anesthetizing effects of menthol masks the harshness of tobacco, making it more appealing to beginning smokers, and menthol smokers show greater dependence, and are less likely to quit than non-menthol smokers. Postponing youth experimentation and initiation can help reduce the number of youths who will ever begin smoking.

Removing all flavored tobacco, without exemptions, is also a social justice issue. Tobacco companies have aggressively marketed menthol to youth in communities of color, the LGBT community, and those in low income neighborhoods. These are the same communities who already bear a greater burden of health disparities and often have less access to healthcare. Increasing tobacco use in these communities increases the health disparities among the most vulnerable in our communities. Presently, more than 40 jurisdictions in places as diverse as Yolo County, Contra Costa County, and the cities of Beverly Hills and Richmond have passed strong policies.

Increasing the price of tobacco products reduces availability of these products to young people who are price sensitive, therefore establishing a minimum price for tobacco products adds a strong provision in any comprehensive tobacco retailer licensing policy. When tobacco products are made more expensive, fewer people use tobacco, fewer initiate tobacco use, and more people quit tobacco use. Prohibiting coupon redemption and discounting maintains the intent of the ordinance to keep tobacco prices higher and out of the hands of youth. We support your inclusion of a minimum price for tobacco products with no discounting or coupon redemption as part of your local policy.

Additionally, we support your amendment to require all new tobacco retailers to locate a minimum of 1000-feet from any school. By not allowing new retailers to locate near youth centered areas, youth exposure to tobacco product marketing decreases. Research shows that when tobacco retailers are located near schools or homes youth experimentation with tobacco products goes up. The tobacco industry pours millions of dollars a day into in-store marketing because they know it works. When retailers are located near youth focused areas, youth are exposed to this marketing on a frequent basis. Prohibiting new retailers from locating within 1000-feet of a school, library, park or residential neighborhood will reduce youth exposure to tobacco industry marketing.

While cigarette smoking has declined in recent years, use of menthol and other flavored products have continued to increase, especially among young people and beginning smokers. **We strongly encourage this Board to choose the strongest youth protections available by**

prohibiting the sale of all flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, and without exemptions. We also support requiring a minimum price for all tobacco products, prohibiting tobacco coupon redemption, and requiring that any new tobacco retailer locates a minimum of 1000-feet from schools. Taking this important public health step will help to prevent young people in Santa Barbara County from ever beginning this deadly addiction, as well as help to support those who are trying to quit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Primo J. Castro". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "P".

Primo J. Castro
Director, Government Relations
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network