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Subject Matter: HB 134 (Tobacco Flavor Ban)

Dear House, Economic Matters Committee

I am writing to address my concerns about the egregious plan being considered which includes menthol cigarettes in the proposed ban on flavored tobacco products, which supposedly focuses on youth tobacco use (vaping) especially, but lumps menthol cigarettes into this smorgasbord of regulations that borders on preposterous.

As an ex-smoker and concerned community leader, it is my moral duty to examine prospective laws to ensure they will serve the greater good for my community where they are enforced. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "In the end, for laws to be obeyed, we must believe they are right."

I fully support efforts to reduce the use of tobacco, by our children, however, I am concerned that the proposed ban is currently written too broadly and will have unintentional consequences that disproportionately criminalize African American adults, and other people of color, mentally ill and the homeless in my community.

The inclusion of menthol cigarettes in the proposed ban disproportionately criminalizes African Americans, other people of color, the poor and includes some obvious, but hopefully unintended consequences. **We just got through de-criminalizing marijuana and we don't want to open up this apparent "Pandora's Box" of Menthol.**

Menthol cigarettes only make up about 1/3 of the current market, **yet 80% of African Americans in U.S. along with large numbers of people of color and the poor, who smoke cigarettes, smoke menthol cigarettes.** Thus, the proposed ban of menthol cigarettes disproportionately punishes and stigmatizes African American smokers, other people of color and the poor.

A menthol ban would also create increased interaction between law enforcement and members of our community. You must understand, my genuine concern as we continue to fight for police accountability when working with the African American community, other people of color and the poor, **if you don't ban all cigarettes you really shouldn't ban any.**

With high profile cases such as Eric Gardner who died at the hands of an officer for selling a loose cigarette, it is imperative that we do not support laws that may increase police interaction. *I in no way support the use of tobacco.* I do, however, ask you to carefully review the proposed ban so that it does not create more problems than it solves.

We must educate our children and provide examples for them to follow. I smoked for 32 years it was my family's prayers and support that enabled me to overcome that insidious habit before it destroyed my health. Education is important to reduce tobacco use, but criminalizing it is not the answer. **Twenty years plus smoke free...**

Sincerely,

George E. White