

February 7, 2018

The Honorable John J. Burzichelli  
Chair  
Appropriations Committee  
New Jersey Assembly  
199 East Broadway  
1st Floor, Suite G  
Salem, NJ 08079

Re: American Medical Association support for Assembly Bill 2185

Dear Chair Burzichelli:

On behalf of the American Medical Association and our physician and medical student members, I am writing to express our support for Assembly Bill 2185, legislation that will prohibit the sale of menthol tobacco products. We applaud the New Jersey Assembly for considering this important public health measure to reduce the harmful health effects of tobacco use.

Menthol tobacco products are often perceived to be “safer” than non-mentholated products. Menthol is marketed for its physiological effects as an anti-irritant and a cooling agent that makes the product easier to inhale. It is one of the few tobacco additives for which consumers make conscious buying choices. Levels of menthol have been deliberately manipulated to please new and young smokers because menthol masks the harshness and discomfort of inhaling smoke. Such marketing has been tragically successful and menthol cigarettes have been shown to increase youth smoking initiation: 54 percent of smokers ages 12-17 use menthol cigarettes compared with less than one-third of smokers ages 35 and older.<sup>1</sup> Among African-American youth, menthol use is even higher: seven out of ten African-American youth smokers use mentholated cigarettes.<sup>2</sup>

Yet menthol-flavored tobacco products have the same or worse health effects as other tobacco products. Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, causing nearly half a million deaths each year, including more than 41,000 deaths caused by secondhand smoke.<sup>3</sup> More than 16 million people live with disease caused by smoking, such as cancer, heart disease, stroke, lung diseases, diabetes, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.<sup>4</sup> The risks posed by menthol-flavored tobacco products may even rise above those of non-menthol products. Because of the anti-irritant

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<sup>1</sup> Andrea Villanti, et al., *Changes in the prevalence and correlates of menthol cigarette use in the USA, 2004–2014*, Tobacco Control (Oct. 2016)

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Smoking and Tobacco Use: Fast Facts, available at [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/fast\\_facts/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fast_facts/index.htm)

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

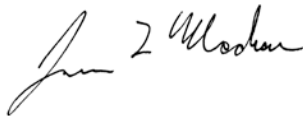
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properties of menthol, smokers may inhale more deeply, allowing harmful particles to settle more deeply in the lungs. For that reason, smoking mentholated cigarettes may increase the risk of both lung and bronchial cancer beyond that of regular cigarettes. In addition, menthol cigarettes have also been shown to have higher carbon monoxide concentrations than regular cigarettes.<sup>5</sup> Studies have also shown that, in addition to the addictive sensory effects and flavor of menthol, menthol may decrease metabolism of nicotine and increase the amount of the chemical in the blood, fostering addiction, inhibiting cessation and promoting relapse.<sup>6</sup>

The threat posed by menthol cigarettes is especially pronounced for African-Americans. Each year, more than 72,000 African-Americans are diagnosed with a tobacco-related cancer and more than 39,000 die from a tobacco-related cancer.<sup>7</sup> The high rate of mortality and morbidity may result, in part, from greater use of menthol cigarettes. Of African-American smokers, nearly 90 percent smoke menthol cigarettes, and young African-Americans who begin smoking overwhelmingly use mentholated cigarettes.<sup>8</sup> Historically, advertising of menthol cigarettes has heavily targeted African-American communities.

Because menthol cigarettes pose a heightened risk of smoking initiation and addiction, we believe that prohibiting the sale of menthol tobacco is in the interest of public health. We urge passage of this important measure and thank you for your consideration of our views. If you need further information, please contact Annalia Michelman, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, Advocacy Resource Center, at [annalia.michelman@ama-assn.org](mailto:annalia.michelman@ama-assn.org), or (312) 464-4788.

Sincerely,



James L. Madara, MD

cc: New Jersey Medical Society

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<sup>5</sup> Murray Jarvik, et al. *Mentholated cigarettes decrease puff volume of smoke and increase carbon monoxide absorption*, 56 *Physiology & Behavior* 3, 563-70 (Sep. 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Allison Hoffman, *The health effects of menthol cigarettes as compared to non-menthol cigarettes*, 9 *Tobacco Induced Diseases* 1 (2011)

<sup>7</sup> Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, *Tobacco Use Among African Americans*, fact sheet, available at <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0006.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Smoking and Tobacco Use: African Americans and Tobacco Use*, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/disparities/african-americans/index.htm>