



## DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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For Immediate Release  
January 22, 2021

News Release 2021-05

### **Hawaii Attorney General Urges FDA to Ban Menthol Cigarettes**

**HONOLULU** – Hawaii Attorney General Clare E. Connors joined a coalition of 23 attorneys general led by Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul and Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden in calling on the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ban menthol cigarettes. In a letter submitted today, the coalition argues that a ban on menthol cigarettes would benefit public health overall, decrease youth smoking, and help mitigate the harm of menthol cigarettes on minority populations.

“We must persist with our decades’ long campaign against smoking, including among our youth,” said Attorney General Connors. “We know menthol cigarettes make smoking more attractive and we also know that marketing of menthol cigarettes disproportionately impacts minorities. Banning them will positively impact the wellbeing of Hawaii’s people and will improve the overall health of the state.”

The letter submitted the attorneys general urge the FDA to complete rulemaking to prohibit menthol cigarettes. The coalition argues that such a prohibition would save thousands of lives and should be implemented immediately. Despite the overall decline in non-menthol smoking, the coalition points out that the prevalence of menthol smoking has remained constant in recent years – and disproportionately impacts youth and minority populations. The attorneys general state that menthol cigarettes remain a major barrier to smoking cessation and the reduction of smoking-related health conditions.

The 1998 Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) entered into between 46 states and the major cigarette manufacturers placed restrictions on the advertising, marketing and promotion of cigarettes and committed the parties to reducing underage tobacco use. Due in part to the MSA, youth cigarette smoking has declined significantly; however, menthol remains the primary reason youths begin, continue and become addicted to smoking. Menthol in cigarettes disguises their harsh flavor, making it attractive for beginners who experiment with cigarettes, and ultimately become addicted.

In the letter, the attorneys general highlight the FDA’s own data showing the addictiveness of menthol cigarettes. Research into the health impact of menthol in cigarettes conducted by the FDA and its Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory

Committee (TPSAC) concluded that the removal of menthol cigarettes from the marketplace would benefit public health. Reports issued by both entities determined menthol cigarettes were associated with increased smoking initiation by youth and young adults, greater likelihood of progression to regular smoking, reduced success in smoking cessation, and greater addiction and nicotine dependency among smokers.

According to the coalition, data has demonstrated that menthol cigarettes increase the number of youth smokers because they find menthol cigarettes to be easier to smoke and perceive them to be less harmful than non-menthol cigarettes. The attorneys general point to 2019 data that estimated 46.7% of middle and high school-aged smokers use menthol cigarettes. Studies have also shown that the use of menthol cigarettes by youth is even higher among African American youth, as menthol cigarettes are marketed disproportionately to younger people and African Americans. Recent data shows that menthol use is highest among African American smokers, with 89% of all African American smokers smoking menthol cigarettes – compared to 26% of white smokers. More than 93% of African American smokers began cigarette usage by smoking menthol cigarettes.

The coalition also argues the sensory effects and flavor of menthol can make cigarettes more addictive. Additionally, menthol smokers are less likely to successfully quit than non-menthol smokers. The attorneys general argue that scientific evidence consistently demonstrates that removing menthol cigarettes from the marketplace will prevent more youth from smoking, improve smoking cessation outcomes and benefit public health overall.

Joining Attorneys General Connors, Raoul and Wasden in submitting the letter are the attorneys general of Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, the Northern Mariana Islands, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

A copy of the letter can be found [here](#).

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