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**Chicago City Council Health Committee  
July 6, 2020 - Subject Matter Hearing – Flavored Tobacco  
Javette C. Orgain, MD, MPH, FAAFP**

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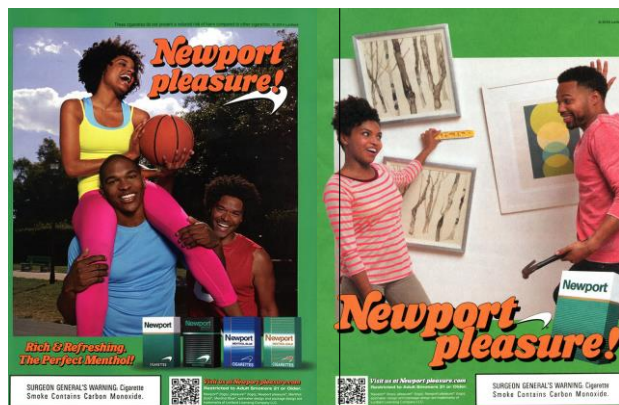
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Greetings, I am Dr. Javette Orgain, a past president of the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians and past chair of the Illinois State Board of Health. I was born, raised, and educated in Chicago. I have practiced family medicine for decades on Chicago's South side and spent decades fighting for health care policies to protect public health and eliminate disparities among all populations. I have provided testimony to this Chicago City Council Health Committee on this very subject numerous times with a similar message. So, I am grateful to speak again today.

If we believe that Black lives matter, then their health matters just as much. We stand against physical violence, as well as societal, economic and racist injustices against marginalized communities. We therefore cannot allow the tobacco industry to continue to "hit" minorities as an easy target. Now in 2020, we face the devastation of COVID-19, which has sickened and killed a disproportionate number of Blacks in Chicago and nationwide. The National Institute on Drug Abuse recently concluded ***"Because it attacks the lungs, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 could be an especially serious threat to those who smoke tobacco or marijuana or who vape."***

One of the most impactful policies we can enact now is a total ban on all flavors, including mint and menthol, across all products – in order to remove any attraction for these harmful and addictive products.

For decades, mint and menthol products have been specifically marketed to the Black community. Our physician members in those communities will tell you – menthol got their patients started and keeps them addicted. Remember those ads for Kool (with a K) and Newport cigarettes!



Dating as far back to the 1950s, **let me repeat - the 1950's**, the tobacco industry has targeted these communities with marketing for menthol cigarettes through sponsorship of community and music events, targeted magazine advertising, and point of sale marketing.

The tobacco industry initially marketed menthol cigarettes as safer and healthier cigarettes because of their **cooling properties**. This was absolutely false advertising. In 2013, the FDA found that it is **“likely that menthol cigarettes pose a public health risk above that seen with nonmenthol cigarettes.”** Yet, seven years later, in 2020, menthol is completely unregulated. In fact, the FDA's Tobacco Products **Scientific** Advisory Committee concluded that menthol cigarettes are marketed disproportionately to younger smokers and African Americans.

Fast forward from the 1950's and vape manufacturers are using the same playbook today.

In 2019, 64 percent of Illinois high school e-cigarette users reported a preference for mint, menthol, or fruit flavors. Meanwhile, only about 40 percent of Illinois 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students believe that vaping is harmful or addictive. **New products, same old dirty tricks and tactics.**

My family physician colleagues who practice on the West side of Chicago quickly point to the new trends in tobacco use among their African American patients. It is no coincidence that these insidious products are called **“Black and Mild.”** The ads and packaging are literally laser-focused on the young Black consumer.

Additionally, there has been an explosion in the market share of cheap, flavored cigars. Sales of all cigars more than doubled between 2000 and 2017, generally increasing at a time when cigarette sales have been declining. **We cannot ignore the tempting role of menthol and other flavors in the resurgence of nicotine use and addiction.**

Let me stress that our community health care providers, family physicians, pediatricians, and health educators, stand ready to help those already hooked on these products to quit. We will work with them on quitting, just as we work to address all of their other health care needs. Trained experts are available at the Illinois Tobacco Quitline who can help by phone and connect callers to safe and effective resources.

Councilors, please do the right thing and let us help these marginalized communities break the chain of nicotine addiction and realize the better health that they deserve. Councilors, I implore you, if not now when. If not you, then who!

**PLEASE END THE SALE OF FLAVORED TOBACCO PRODUCTS.**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

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*Founded in 1947, The Illinois Academy of Family Physicians (IAFP) is a professional medical society dedicated to maintaining high standards of family medicine representing over 5,000 family physicians, residents and medical students. IAFP provides continuing medical education (CME) programming, advocacy through all levels of government and opportunities for member engagement and interaction.*

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