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Chair, Coalition for Tobacco-free West Virginia

## Historic Move to Ban Menthol Cigarettes and Flavored Cigars

Charleston, West Virginia— In a historic move, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced proposed rules to prohibit menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars, which tobacco companies have used to target Black communities and kids for decades. As West Virginia continues to lead the country with tobacco usage rates among youth and adults, this ruling can significantly impact public health outcomes in our state.

Members of the Coalition for Tobacco-Free West Virginia (CTFWV) & the WV African American Tobacco Prevention Network (WVAATPN) support the FDA's bold action prohibiting menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars.

Rhonda Robinson, Director of the WV African American Tobacco Prevention Network, states, "We applaud the FDA for taking this critical step to protect our nation's children from addiction and save lives. However, the FDA must finalize and implement this lifesaving policy without delay."

"For too long, tobacco companies have targeted kids and Black communities with menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars to boost their bottom line, devastatingly impacting public health. Now, in a historic move, the FDA is taking steps to eliminate these products, putting kids and lives ahead of the tobacco industry's profits," said Dr. Donald Reed, Cessation Coordinator for the African American Tobacco Prevention Coalition and member of CTFWV.

Scientific evidence shows that menthol cigarettes are more addictive, easier for kids to start smoking, and harder for smokers to quit. The FDA and its Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee have repeatedly concluded that eliminating menthol cigarettes would benefit public health in the United States, especially among Black Americans. A recent study estimated that, from 1980 to 2018, menthol cigarettes were responsible for 10.1 million extra smokers, 378,000 premature deaths and 3 million life years lost in the U.S. That's roughly 10,000 premature deaths and 265,000 new smokers each year.

Eliminating menthol cigarettes will protect kids from tobacco addiction, save lives, and reduce health disparities, especially among Black Americans. Menthol cools and numbs the throat and masks the harshness of tobacco smoke, making it easier for kids to start smoking and eventually become addicted. Half of all kids who have ever tried smoking started with menthol cigarettes.

Menthol cigarettes disproportionately harm the health of Black Americans and worsen horrific health disparities. For decades, the tobacco industry has targeted Black communities with marketing for menthol cigarettes. Largely because of menthol cigarettes, Black smokers have a harder time quitting smoking and die at high rates from tobacco-related diseases like cancer, heart disease and stroke. Menthol cigarettes are a major reason why tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable death among Black Americans, claiming 45,000 Black lives every year.

All Tobacco Users in WV are encouraged to enroll in the state tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW. WV smokers can also enroll online for services by visiting <https://wvtobaccoquitline.com/> or by text at 304-583-4010.

