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Since 1908, Breathe California has fought for clean air, healthy lungs and the elimination of lung disease in the San Francisco Bay Area.

A member of the
Breathe America™
Alliance

May 10, 2017

San Francisco Board of Supervisors
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
City Hall, Room 244
San Francisco, CA 94102-4689



Dear Supervisors Breed, Cohen, Farrell, Fewer, Kim, Peskin, Ronen, Safaí, Sheehy, Tang and Yee:

On behalf of Breathe California's Board of Directors and staff I would like to thank Supervisor Cohen for the incredible leadership she has shown introducing legislation to end the sale of flavored tobacco products in San Francisco. As the CEO of a lung and environmental health nonprofit organization founded in San Francisco over 100 years ago I am proud to stand and work with you to ensure the health of our residents comes before corporate or other interests.

Lung disease is the 2nd leading cause of death in the United States and tobacco is the #1 preventable cause of deathⁱ. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)—deeply debilitating and primarily caused by tobacco useⁱⁱ—is the 3rd leading cause of death alone. Over 90% of smokers began smoking before age 18ⁱⁱⁱ and 80% of teen smokers started with a flavored tobacco product such as menthol cigarettes, fruit-flavored cigars, or candy-flavored vapes/e-cigarettes.^{iv} Breathe California has been educating our San Francisco communities about the dangers of tobacco for decades. Over the last two years, by surveying high school students, conducting focus groups, and providing education to our communities, our team of youth advocates has worked to draw attention to how the tobacco industry uses flavors to target young people.

Flavored tobacco is similar to the inclusion of toys in fast food children's meals: just like the very presence of the toy encourages children to choose unhealthy food, flavors in tobacco draw youth into smoking. Flavored tobacco products' bright packaging and low price mimic those of candy, which makes flavored tobacco incredibly attractive to youth. We have met countless community members who mistook our display of flavored tobacco products as candy at our presentations and events; parents are especially horrified when they realize it isn't candy at all! The San Francisco Board of Supervisors has already restricted the inclusion of toys from fast food meals to protect youth health. We urge you to prohibit the sale of flavored tobacco products as well.

This is an issue not only of youth health, but also of social justice. Menthol cigarette users, especially younger smokers and people of color,^v have a harder time quitting. Youth menthol cigarette smokers are disproportionately African American, Asian American, LGBT, and from low-income communities^{vi} already significantly impacted by lung disease^{vii}.

Breathe California believes no one should ever struggle to breathe and we fight lung disease each day through advocacy, grassroots programs and direct services. We work with individuals, families, and communities fighting to improve the quality of their lives and we know how painful, isolating, and hopeless many people feel when they are struggling with tobacco addiction and tobacco-related disease. For decades Breathe California has worked in partnership with the Board of Supervisors, to prohibit the sale of single cigarettes (1991), establish smoke-free workplaces that pre-date California law (1994), smoke-free bars (1998), smoke-free playgrounds (2002), tobacco retailer licenses (2003), smoke-free parks (2005), tobacco-free pharmacies

(2008), smoke-free events (2013), and e-cigarette regulations (2014).

Youth often don't understand that the health impacts from tobacco may not be felt for decades. My father is a good example of this; he first began smoking as a teenager and although he hasn't smoked since 1989 he was diagnosed with lung cancer just last month. Having already lost two uncles to tobacco-related lung disease, in addition to working with people battling lung disease every day, I know how agonizing it is to watch people you love struggle with oxygen tanks, tests, treatments, and surgeries - all due to tobacco use. Your action passing this legislation will help protect the next generation of San Franciscans, and their families, from suffering the same way.

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors has always been a champion for the wellbeing of our youth and San Francisco has consistently provided new models for community health for the nation to follow. You are in a powerful position to save lives! You now have the opportunity to do something no other city has done before - you can advance health equity by eliminating the sale of flavored tobacco.

Thank you for helping ensure the health of all San Franciscans. I urge you to prioritize the health of our most vulnerable communities and take this bold step to eliminate the sale of flavored tobacco products.

With respect and gratitude,



Tanya Stevenson, EdD, MPH
President & CEO

i Carter B, et al., "Smoking and Mortality – Beyond Established Causes", *New England Journal of Medicine*, 2015;372:631-40.

ii Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Annual smoking-attributable mortality, years of potential life lost, and productivity losses—United States, 1997–2001. *MMWR*. 2005;54(250):625-628.

iii US Department of Health and Human Services. 2012. Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General.

iv Ambrose BK, et al., "Flavored Tobacco Product Use Among US Youth Aged 12-17 Years, 2013-2014". *JAMA* 2015; 314(17): 1871-1873.

v Foulds J, et al. 2010. Do Smokers of Menthol Cigarettes Find It Harder to Quit Smoking? *Nicotine Tob Res* (2010) 12 (suppl_2): S102-S109.

vi Giovino GA, et al., "Differential trends in cigarette smoking in the USA: is menthol slowing progress?" *Tobacco Control* 2015; 24: 28-37.

vii San Francisco Health Improvement Program. 2017. Community Health Dashboard data available at www.sfhip.org.