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November 8, 2019

Monica Valdes Lupi  
Executive Director  
Boston Public Health Commission  
1010 Massachusetts Ave, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Boston, MA 02118

Dear Ms. Valdes Lupi:

The [Massachusetts Dental Society](http://massdental.org) (MDS) represents approximately 5,000, or 80 percent, of dentists in the Commonwealth through initiatives in education, advocacy, and promotion of the highest professional standards. As the leading authority on oral health care in Massachusetts, we take great pride in championing oral health and lending the voice of dentistry to worthy initiatives that can make a difference in the lives of residents across the Bay State.

Reducing tobacco use is a priority issue for the MDS due to the oral health complications caused by smoking and tobacco products. In addition to heart disease, lung disease, and other health problems, tobacco use has been associated with serious oral health impacts including oral cancer and gum disease.

**The MDS joins fellow members of the Tobacco Free Mass Coalition in encouraging the Boston Public Health Commission to hold a vote during its November 20 meeting on restricting the sale of ALL mint, menthol, and wintergreen tobacco products to adult-only tobacco retailers.**

Removing the existing sales exemption for mint, menthol, and wintergreen products will help reduce tobacco use and nicotine addiction—especially among youth—which will improve health, save lives, and reduce health care costs.

Banning or restricting sales of flavored products is a key strategy in the fight to make sure that young people grow up without the burden of tobacco and nicotine addiction. Young people use flavored tobacco products at high rates. According to the 2017 Massachusetts Youth Health Survey, 80% of Massachusetts high school youth who are current tobacco users reported using a flavored tobacco product in the past 30 days. Mint, menthol, and wintergreen are popular flavors among young people, and they are one of the most popular e-cigarette flavors among youth.

Flavors undoubtedly make it easier for kids to start using tobacco products and e-cigarettes. They make the products seem harmless and familiar, while hiding the bad taste of tobacco. Menthol has the additional quality of soothing the irritation of combustible cigarettes, which is why so

many young people start smoking using menthol cigarettes. The FDA's Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee found that youth smokers are more likely to use menthol cigarettes than any other age group, with 54 percent of youth smokers ages 12-17 using menthol cigarettes, compared to less than one-third of smokers ages 35 and older. And, according to the FDA, it is "likely that menthol cigarettes pose a public health risk above that seen with nonmenthol cigarettes" due to their association with increased nicotine dependence and reduced success in smoking cessation.

According to a report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), almost a third of middle and high school students who used e-cigarettes in 2016 said the availability of flavors was a main reason they did. While smoking e-cigarettes may pose fewer health risks than smoking regular tobacco cigarettes—the leading cause of preventable death in the United States—it is by no means harmless. E-cigarettes still contain nicotine—the addictive drug in regular cigarettes, cigars, and other tobacco products—which increases the risk of high blood pressure and diabetes. The flavoring agents in e-cigarettes also may cause a chronic lung disease called bronchiolitis obliterans.

E-cigarettes also can have a significant impact on oral health. Scientists evaluated e-cigarette aerosols and found that they have similar properties to high-sucrose, gelatinous candies and acidic drinks. A study supported by the American Dental Association Foundation determined that vaping sweet e-cigarettes, including popular mint varieties, can increase the risk of dental cavities. Additionally, the nicotine in e-cigarettes reduces blood flow, restricting the supply of nutrients and oxygen to the soft tissues of the mouth. This can cause the gums to recede and exacerbate periodontal diseases. Reduced blood circulation also inhibits the mouth's natural ability to fight against bacteria, which can accelerate infection, decay, and other problems. The Massachusetts Dental Society's *Word of Mouth* publication includes more information on the dangers of e-cigarettes in the Winter/Spring 2019 cover story, "The Youth Vaping Epidemic." I invite you to learn more at [massdental.org/vaping](http://massdental.org/vaping).

**The MDS urges the city of Boston to help protect residents from tobacco and nicotine addiction, and its detrimental impacts on oral and overall health, by restricting the sale of ALL mint, menthol, and wintergreen tobacco products to adult-only tobacco retailers.**

Sincerely,

Dr. Janis B. Moriarty  
President  
Massachusetts Dental Society