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## White House Delay in Issuing Final Menthol and Flavored Cigar Rules Represents Huge Loss for Public Health, Social Justice

*Statement from Kathy Crosby, Truth Initiative CEO and President*

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 1, 2024)** – It is deeply disappointing that the Biden Administration has not finalized critical rules to remove menthol as a characterizing flavor in cigarettes and eliminate all characterizing flavors from cigars in March 2024, as they had committed to do. Approval of these rules has the potential to be one of the most historic public health victories. Instead, lack of action squanders the ability to save lives, protect youth and stand up for social justice by reducing health disparities. It will inevitably result in more smokers, more addiction and more lives lost, particularly in Black and LGBTQ+ communities, which experience greater health disparities due to the tobacco industry's long record of predatory marketing.

Make no mistake: This indefinite delay deals a massive blow to health equity, social justice — and ultimately public health. Achieving President Biden's ambitious Cancer Moonshot goal to cut cancer death rates in half over the next 25 years and significantly reduce health disparities requires bringing all resources to bear. Eliminating menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars is of paramount importance to reaching that target, and the Administration's failure to do so represents a self-inflicted wound that not only buys into a false narrative pushed by the tobacco industry, but ultimately puts politics over public health. A poll conducted by the Washington D.C.-based Mellman found that 58% of voters favor a federal menthol removal; among Black voters, 62% support this action. Additionally, a CDC survey found that 62% of Americans surveyed support ending the sale of menthol products, illustrating widespread approval for this action, which is being ignored by the Administration.

The failure to act also represents a significant victory for the tobacco industry, whose well-documented exploitative practices have come at the expense of hundreds of thousands of lives. Black Americans in particular have borne the unjust burden of tobacco-related death and disease due to menthol cigarettes — which are easier to start, more addictive and harder to quit. For decades, the industry has targeted Black Americans, devastating families, fueling health disparities and bringing death and disease to communities of color. Research shows that between 1980 and 2018, menthol cigarettes contributed to an additional 10.1 million smokers and 378,000 premature deaths. Despite representing only 12% of the population, Black Americans accounted for 41% of these premature deaths.



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Menthol cigarettes can be a gateway product to youth nicotine addiction that have plagued our nation for far too long, fostering dependence and proving more challenging to quit compared to non-menthol cigarettes. Tobacco companies purposefully engineered menthol cigarettes to make smoking initiation easy — the cool, minty flavor reduces the harshness of cigarette smoke and suppresses the coughing reflex. Studies show that youth and young adults are more likely to try a menthol cigarette as their first cigarette and, as a result, are more likely to become addicted and lifelong customers of the tobacco industry. In fact, 40.4% of all middle school and high school students who currently smoke cigarettes reported using menthol cigarettes, according to the 2023 National Youth Tobacco Survey.

The science is clear: It has been over a decade since the FDA's Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee reviewed research on menthol cigarettes and unequivocally recommended their removal for the betterment of public health. Subsequent studies have only reinforced this conclusion. A recent study estimated that removing menthol products would reduce overall smoking rates by 15% within five years and save 650,000 lives, including 255,000 Black lives, within 40 years. A decision not to act on these rules will go down as one of the most resounding public health policy failures of our time, dealing a devastating setback to health equity and social justice that will reverberate for years to come.

### **About Truth Initiative®**

Truth Initiative is a national public health organization dedicated to achieving a culture where all young people reject smoking and vaping, and anyone can quit. Our impact has helped drive youth smoking prevalence down from 23% in 2000 to a historic low of 2% in 2023. Through our proven-effective and nationally recognized **truth**® public education campaign and market leading cessation programs, we are leading the fight as e-cigarette use threatens to put a new generation at risk of nicotine addiction. Our first-of-its-kind, text message quit vaping program *This Is Quitting* has enrolled over 700,000 young people nationwide and our youth e-cigarette prevention curriculum *Vaping: Know the truth*® is being used in more than 9,000 schools nationwide. Our rigorous scientific research and policy studies, community and youth engagement programs supporting populations at high risk of using tobacco, and innovation in tobacco dependence treatment continue to help end one of the most critical public health battles of our time. Based in Washington D.C., our organization was established and funded through the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between



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attorneys general from 46 states, five U.S. territories and the tobacco industry.  
To learn more, visit [truthinitiative.org](https://truthinitiative.org).

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