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**COALITION TO END SALE OF FLAVORED TOBACCO PRODUCTS
LAUDS FDA RULING TO BAN MENTHOL CIGARETTES
*Rulemaking Process Could Take Years While Black Lives Are Exploited for
Tobacco Industry Profits; Local Action in Denver is Needed Now
— Local Leaders Available for Interview —***

Denver, Colo. — Today, a coalition of organizations leading the effort to end the sale of flavored tobacco products in Denver lauded the Biden Administration’s announcement that the Food and Drug Administration will begin the rule-making process to ban menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars. By prohibiting menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars, the FDA can take bold action to protect kids from tobacco addiction, save lives and reduce health disparities, especially among Black Americans who have long been targeted by the tobacco industry with predatory marketing of these products.

Ending flavored tobacco sales is an urgent social justice issue. Since the 1950s, the industry has targeted Black communities and kids with pervasive marketing of menthol cigarettes through magazine advertising, event sponsorships, free samples, promotions and other tactics. **In the 1950s, less than 10% of Black smokers used menthol cigarettes — today, that number is 85%.** Menthol cigarettes are disproportionately used by African American, Latino American, LGBTQ and low-income communities already burdened by tobacco-related diseases. Black men are more likely to be diagnosed and die from lung cancer than any other population. [Menthol cigarettes continue to be heavily advertised, widely available and priced cheaper in Black communities, making them especially appealing to price-sensitive youth.](#)

“Tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable death among Black Americans, claiming 45,000 Black lives every year — and menthol cigarettes are a major contributor,” said **Dr. Terri Richardson, a physician and vice chair of the Colorado Black Health Collaborative**, which works to achieve health equity in Colorado’s Black community. “It’s the discriminatory marketing by the industry that has led to the disproportionate use of menthol and higher rates of heart disease, cancer, and stroke among Black Americans. I’m encouraged by the Biden Administration’s action, but we cannot sit idly and wait for a process that will take years while the tobacco industry exploits Black lives for profit.”

Former Denver City Council President and longtime community activist, Hon. Elbra Wedgeworth also praised the Administration’s ruling. “Menthol is another example of the health inequities that have plagued the African-American community and people of color for many generations. We must continue to push for policy solutions that stop the tobacco industry’s predatory practices that have persisted for many generations, and hold those who seek to profit of African American lives accountable. We need to address the systemic causes of addiction including poverty and a lack of accessible and affordable health care. This is now, and has always been, a social justice issue.”

It will likely take years for the FDA to finalize and implement the necessary regulations to prohibit menthol cigarettes, and tobacco industry lawsuits could cause more delays. The FDA and its Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee have both concluded that eliminating menthol cigarettes would benefit public health, especially among Black Americans. The FDA’s own scientific analysis concluded that menthol cigarettes increase smoking initiation and progression to regular smoking among youth and young adults, increase nicotine dependence (addiction), and reduce success in quitting, especially among Black menthol smokers.

“If anything, the FDA’s decision creates an even greater obligation for states and cities to take action, because it shows there is overwhelming scientific evidence to support eliminating menthol cigarettes and other flavored tobacco products,” said **Denver City Councilwoman Amanda P. Sandoval**. “As Colorado’s most populous city, Denver has a responsibility to show leadership by prioritizing the health of our community over tobacco industry profits. As a mother of two teenagers this issue is near and dear to my heart and I look forward to working with my colleagues, to end the sale of flavored tobacco products in the city and county of Denver. This is a necessary step toward improving the lives of Brown and Black residents and preventing youth tobacco addiction.”

Calls to ban menthol cigarettes began in 2013, with 19 public health organizations filing a citizen petition calling on the FDA to prohibit menthol as a characterizing flavor on cigarettes. Last year, the African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council (AATCLC), Action on Smoking and Health, the American Medical Association and the National Medical Association filed a federal lawsuit asserting that the FDA’s failure to respond to the 2013 citizen petition constituted “unreasonable delay” in violation of the Administrative Procedure Act. The FDA in January committed to the court that it would issue a “final citizen petition response” by April 29, 2021. The FDA’s decision does not ban menthol immediately, but kicks off a process that could take years.

For additional commentary in response to this ruling, the following people are available for interview:

- **Hon. Elbra Wedgeworth**, former City Council President and longtime community activist
- **Brother Jeff (Jeff Fard)**, board member for the Center for African American Health and multimedia journalist, historian, and community organizer
- **Amanda Sandoval**, Denver City Councilwoman

- **Dr. Tony D. Henderson**, Presiding Elder Denver District African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
- **Jodi Radke**, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
- **Rebecca Dubroff**, American Heart Association

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