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Caryn Cohen, M.S., Office of Science
Center for Tobacco Products
Food and Drug Administration
9200 Corporate Blvd.
Rockville, MD 20850
TPSAC@fda.hhs.gov

Dear Ms. Cohen:

This letter is sent from the San Diego Black Health Associates, Inc., an organization of health professionals committed to improving the health and well-being of African Americans in San Diego County through legislative information, advocacy, direct educational programs and professional development. We write this correspondence to provide support to the belief that menthol should not be added to cigarettes to provide a false sense of its safety or to “enhance its marketability”.

Over the past 10 years, we have become convinced of four tobacco-related axioms:

1. Reducing the sale of tobacco and tobacco products will lower health care expenses. Indeed, tobacco cessation is a high priority prevention effort, central to improved health outcomes.
2. African Americans present health disparities at rates which are 20-30-40% greater than Caucasians, specifically for lung cancer mortality;
3. While Caucasians smoke cigarettes of which 25% are comprised of menthol, nearly 75% of African Americans smoke cigarettes using menthol, making smoking easier to start;
4. Younger African American should be protected from customer representatives who are interested in market share and return on investment, and not their best health interests.

Kindly add our name to the list of organizations and advocacy groups that is opposed to menthol in cigarettes. We believe that menthol should be banned as a candy, fruit or the other spice-like additives. There are no successful marketing strategies that promote choices that result in ill health, while basing its selection on freedom of choice. Preventable deaths are the taxes that cigarette smoking charges all of us. Eliminating menthol from tobacco is a small, but significant, contribution to preventing the loss of life and limb among for us all.

Respectfully,

Paul Simms

Paul B. Simms, MPH, President
San Diego Black Health Associates, Inc.