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## **Truth Initiative Urges Swift Action to Prevent Delay in Removing Menthol and Cigar Flavors, Citing Serious Health Implications**

*Statement of Kathy Crosby, CEO & President of Truth Initiative*

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 6, 2023)** – Truth Initiative is deeply concerned over the Administration’s delay in finalizing crucial rules aimed at removing menthol as a characterizing flavor in cigarettes and eliminating all characterizing flavors from cigars. The originally anticipated timeline for these rules, set for August 2023, has now been extended to March 2024. This delay not only puts the rules at risk of never being finalized but also represents a significant victory for Big Tobacco’s well-documented exploitative practices, all at the expense of our nation’s public health.

These rules are of paramount importance as they hold tremendous potential to save lives, protect youth, reduce health disparities, and play a pivotal role in realizing the President’s Cancer Moonshot. The unjustifiable delay we are witnessing will inevitably result in more smokers and more lives lost. It is disheartening to note that between 1980 and 2018, the presence of menthol cigarettes on the market contributed to an additional 10.1 million smokers and 378,000 premature deaths.

Menthol cigarettes have plagued our nation for far too long and have been identified as a gateway product to nicotine addiction, fostering dependence and proving more challenging to quit compared to non-menthol cigarettes. 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 continue smoking. They have been insidiously marketed to specific communities, particularly Black Americans and the LGBTQ+ community. This tobacco industry marketing strategy has fueled health disparities, with one study revealing that despite representing only 12% of the population, Black Americans accounted for 41% of premature deaths attributable to menthol cigarettes between 1980 and 2018. Prohibiting menthol as a characterizing flavor in cigarettes can prevent an estimated 92,000 to 238,000 smoking-related deaths among Black Americans, as stated by the FDA. Furthermore, flavored cigars are disproportionately used by Black Americans and other minority groups, highlighting the tobacco industry’s unrelenting targeting practices.

We cannot afford to wait any longer for the menthol and flavored cigar rules to be enacted. It has been over a decade since the FDA’s Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee reviewed the science surrounding menthol cigarettes and



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unequivocally recommended their removal for the betterment of public health. Subsequent research has only reinforced this conclusion.

The science and data are clear as is the vast evidence in support of these historic rules. The time for action is now, and we urge the White House to expedite the finalization of these rules as quickly as possible. The health and well-being of our communities depend on it.

### **About Truth Initiative®**

Truth Initiative is a national public health organization dedicated to achieving a culture where all young people reject smoking, vaping and nicotine and a future where commercial tobacco and nicotine addiction are a thing of the past. Our impact has helped drive youth smoking prevalence down from 23% in 2000 to a historic low of 2% in 2022. The truth about tobacco and the tobacco industry are at the heart of our proven-effective and nationally recognized **truth**® public education campaign. As youth e-cigarette use threatens to put a new generation at risk, we are leading the fight against tobacco and nicotine addiction in all forms. Our first-of-its-kind, text message quit vaping program This Is Quitting has enrolled over 670,000 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 are also helping to 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 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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