

My name is Michael Ong. I am a practicing physician and professor of medicine and public health at UCLA. I also am the chair of the state of California Tobacco Education and Research Oversight Committee, also known as TEROC. While I am not speaking on behalf of TEROC, I do want to point out positions already noted by TEROC.

TEROC recommends prohibiting all flavored tobacco products, without exemption for specific flavors, retail locations, or product type. Flavored tobacco products are particularly appealing for youth and young adults to begin using tobacco. In 2018, over 85% of California high school students who used a tobacco product in the past 30 days used a flavored tobacco product, and similar numbers are seen specifically with flavored electronic smoking devices. Due to the current lack of regulation, very few of the flavoring chemicals in electronic smoking devices have undergone adequate toxicity or safety testing for acute or chronic inhalation – a problem highlighted by the recent e-cigarette and vaping-associated lung injury cases here in California and across the country.

TEROC recommends prohibiting all flavors including mint and menthol. Menthol masks the harsh taste of tobacco and makes the smoke easier to inhale, and its anesthetizing effect makes it easier and more appealing to new users, particularly youth, to start using tobacco. Specific populations have been targets of tobacco industry marketing to increase their use of menthol cigarettes, including the African American and LGBTQ communities. Mint, along with fruit and mango, were the top flavors last year for young JUUL users with nearly one third of 18-21 year old JUUL users using mint the last time they vaped.

TEROC also recommends prohibiting sale of flavored tobacco products in all stores. In 2019, over 30% of inspected tobacco stores and smoke shops in California, which should be limited to adults only, sold tobacco products to youth decoys.

It is important for California to act comprehensively in addition to federal action, which exempted certain flavored products that addicted youth are switching towards, such as disposable e-cigarettes and tank-based systems. The Food and Drug Administration have yet to start evaluating any of these products for safety,

and potentially may lose their oversight of tobacco products. Some California communities have exempted tobacco products, like hookah, from flavor regulation. The World Health Organization has determined that one hour of hookah smoking is equivalent to smoking over 100 cigarettes.

California had been making progress on reducing high school aged youth tobacco use, bringing it down from 22.1% in 2009-2010 to 12.2% in 2015-2016. In 2017-18 that rate was 12.7%. We have taken a step backwards and it is critical for the health of California for the Legislature to take action.

- Issue of flavors attracting kids
- Their view of the current health epidemic in relation to youth increase of nicotine use
- Progress lost over the years with reducing underage smokingS
- Recommendations for policies to curb access/decrease smoking rates

My name is Michael Ong. I am a practicing physician and professor of medicine and public health at UCLA. I also am the chair of the state of California Tobacco Education and Research Oversight Committee, also known as TEROC, which has submitted a letter in favor of this ordinance.

TEROC is supportive of a prohibition on sales of all flavored tobacco products. Flavored tobacco products are particularly appealing for youth and young adults to begin using tobacco products. Last year in Los Angeles County, 83% of high school students who used a tobacco product in the past 30 days use a flavored tobacco product. Over 86% of California high school students who used electronic smoking devices in the past 30 days when surveyed used a flavored electronic smoking device. Due to the current lack of regulation, very few of the flavoring chemicals in electronic smoking devices have undergone adequate toxicity or safety testing for acute or chronic inhalation. The lack of product regulation has been particularly highlighted with the recent vaping-associated lung injury cases here in California and across the country.

TEROC recommends prohibiting all flavors including mint and menthol. Menthol masks the harsh taste of tobacco and makes the smoke easier to inhale, and the anesthetizing effect of menthol makes it easier and more appealing to new users, particularly youth, to start using tobacco. Specific populations have been targets of tobacco industry marketing to increase their use of menthol cigarettes, including the African American community and the LGBTQ community. Mint is a top flavor for young JUUL users – among 12-17 year old users of JUUL, 16% used the mint flavor the last time they used JUUL, behind only fruit and mango. For 18-21 year old users of JUUL, nearly one third (32%) used mint the last time they vaped.

TEROC also recommends prohibiting sale of flavored tobacco products in all stores. In 2018, nearly half (49.8%) of tobacco/vape shops in California, which should be limited to adults only, failed to check ID and (44.7%) sold vape products to youth decoys attempted to purchase vape products.

Despite reports that the federal government may restrict flavored electronic smoking devices, it is important for the Board of Supervisors to act separately, as federal action may take years – the Food and Drug Administration announced they would regulate electronic smoking devices in 2011 but have yet to start evaluating any of these products. It is critical for the health of the County for the Board of Supervisors to take action on this ordinance.