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Contact: Claire Natale

Phone: 202.294.5999

Email: claire@evolveprandmarketing.com

Black History Month Draws Attention to Discrimination

The Phoenix African American Community and Individuals Stand Up Against Big Tobacco

PHOENIX – As we celebrate Black History month and the significant contribution African Americans have made to our country, it unfortunately is also a time to call out the disparities. For decades, the tobacco industry has targeted Black Americans, especially youth, with marketing for menthol cigarettes and other flavored tobacco products. This predatory marketing has had a damaging impact on Black health which is why the Phoenix African American community and leading individuals have joined the [Flavors Hook Kids Phoenix Coalition](#) and its effort to secure the passage of an ordinance to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products in the city.

These eight organizations are among the 50-plus that have committed to fighting the tobacco industry in Phoenix and its pervasive impact on the community.

- African American Christian Clergy Coalition, Phoenix chapter
- Arizona Alliance of Black School Educators
- Arizona Informant Foundation
- Black Mothers Forum, Phoenix chapter
- Black Nurses Association of Greater Phoenix Area
- Help Enrich African American Lives Coalition
- NAACP – Maricopa Branch
- The Center for Black Health and Equity

Thanks to decades of widespread targeting, the tobacco industry has succeeded in manipulating generations of Black communities into becoming addicted to menthol cigarettes. The tobacco industry’s intentional marketing tactics have ensured Black communities choose menthol cigarettes over regular cigarettes. For the past 60 years, tobacco companies have targeted Black Americans with slick marketing campaigns in Black media and have flooded Black neighborhoods with free or cheap menthol products, often appropriating Black culture and music to do so.

“We see firsthand the negative effects smoking has on our health and know that we need the support of City officials to make a true difference,” said Zel Fowler, president of the National Alliance of Black School Educators. “It is our kids who have been affected and are the byproduct of Big Tobacco’s efforts. Licensed retailers are the focus of this ordinance and change not the kids.”

Each year, approximately 45,000 African Americans die from smoking-related disease.¹ Smoking-related illnesses are the number one cause of death in the African-American community, surpassing all other causes of death,

¹ 1 US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), “Tobacco Use Among US Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups—African Americans, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics: A Report of the Surgeon General,” 1998, http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/1998/complete_report/pdfs/complete_report.pdf.



including AIDS, homicide, diabetes, and accidents.² Half (50.1%) of youth who have ever tried smoking initiated with menthol flavored cigarettes and they are disproportionately used by communities of color – 85% of all African-American smokers smoke menthol cigarettes and 50% of Hispanic smokers smoke menthol cigarettes compared to 29% of Whites.

With enactment of the ordinance, Phoenix would join a [growing number of states and cities](#) across the country that that have passed similar laws to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products, including e-cigarettes.

For more information visit www.flavorshookkidsphoenix.org and follow on social media at @FlavorsHookKidsPhoenix.

² American Cancer Society, "Cancer Facts & Figures for African Americans, 2013–2014," 2013, <http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/content/@epidemiologysurveillance/documents/document/acspc-036921.pdf>. American Heart Association, "African Americans and Cardiovascular Diseases: Statistical Fact Sheet, 2012 Update," http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heartpublic/@wcm/@sop/@smd/documents/downloadable/ucm_319568.pdf.