

# Rhode Island Chapter

INCORPORATED IN RHODE ISLAND

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



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Support of House Bill 8254  
House Committee on Finance  
April 29, 2026

Dear Chairperson Abney and Members of the Committee,

The Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics **strongly supports H-8254**, which restricts the sale of all flavored electronic nicotine delivery systems, including menthol.

**Tobacco products, including electronic nicotine delivery systems, contain dangerous chemicals and toxins.** Tobacco use continues to be the most common cause of preventable disease and death in the United States, and nearly all tobacco use begins during adolescence and young adulthood.<sup>1</sup> Flavored e-cigarettes not only contain nicotine, a highly addictive drug that can have damaging effects on adolescent brain development, but also chemical flavorings, some of which are known to cause serious lung disease, and other harmful substances.

**Most youth who use tobacco products, including electronic nicotine delivery systems, say they use “because they come in flavors I like.”**<sup>2</sup> Flavored tobacco products are designed to appeal to kids. Kid-friendly flavors like cotton candy, strawberry, and mint mask the taste of tobacco, making it easier for young people to start use. In fact, most youth initiate tobacco use with a flavored product.<sup>3</sup> In Rhode Island, 16.5% of high school students report current use of e-cigarettes.<sup>4</sup> Of those students, 94% report using a flavored product.<sup>4</sup>

**It is imperative to include menthol as a part of any flavor ban.** Menthol reduces the harshness of tobacco smoke, which makes these products more palatable for younger smokers. Younger smokers who start with menthol products are more likely to become long-term daily smokers, and menthol cigarettes are proven to be more addictive and harder to quit than non-flavored cigarettes.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, predatory marketing by the tobacco companies of menthol-flavored products appears disproportionately in predominantly Black neighborhoods, which furthers health disparities.<sup>5</sup>

As a pediatrician, I hear from my patients about their struggles with e-cigarettes and other tobacco products almost every day. One 16-year-old explained that his vaping had “gotten out of control” and was pleading for help to quit. When I asked a 13-year-old why he was vaping with friends at his middle school, he explained that he liked the flavors saying, “**I have a sweet tooth**”. Comprehensive flavor bans are effective in combatting use among teens. After the 2020 state regulation restricting the sale of flavored e-cigarettes went into effect, one 17-year-old former e-cigarette user explained, “**I did not plan to quit but now that I can’t get the flavors I like, I stopped.**”

Preventing tobacco product use among youth is critical to ending the tobacco epidemic and the downstream impacts on our health. We must take action to protect youth by prohibiting the sale of all flavored tobacco products, including menthol-flavored products. **We urge you to support S-8254.**

Sincerely,



Allison Heinly, MD, FAAP  
Board of Directors  
Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

<sup>1</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/php/data-statistics/youth-data-tobacco/?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/youth\\_data/tobacco\\_use/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/php/data-statistics/youth-data-tobacco/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/youth_data/tobacco_use/index.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Ambrose, BK, et al., "Flavored Tobacco Product Use Among US Youth Aged 12-17 Years, 2013-2014," Journal of the American Medical Association, published online October 26, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Tsai J, et al. Reasons for Electronic Cigarette Use Among Middle and High School Students - National Youth Tobacco Survey, United States, 2016. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. 2018 Feb 16;67(6):196-200.

<sup>4</sup> Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, Youth Behavior Risk Survey, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic\\_information/tobacco\\_industry/menthol-cigarettes/index.html#groups-of-people](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/tobacco_industry/menthol-cigarettes/index.html#groups-of-people).