

To the Members of the Committee,

I am writing in opposition to S2098, the proposed ban on menthol products.

Rhode Island's vape industry has already been severely damaged by previous flavor bans. Many small vape shops have struggled to survive, reduced staff, or closed entirely. Passing another restriction on legal adult products will further cripple an industry that is already barely surviving.

It is also important to recognize that menthol products are primarily used by adults. Many adult smokers prefer menthol cigarettes and use menthol vaping products as an alternative to smoking or as part of an effort to move away from combustible tobacco. Removing menthol vape products may push some adults back to traditional cigarettes, which defeats the goal of harm reduction.

Young people generally are not seeking out menthol products the way adults do. Menthol has long been associated with adult smokers, especially those who have used menthol cigarettes for years. This bill mainly impacts law-abiding adults who legally purchase these products and use them responsibly.

There is also growing frustration among many adults over the constant expansion of government control into personal choices. More and more legal products are being restricted or banned, even for consenting adults. At some point, people begin asking: where are our choices? Where is our free will? Adults are capable of making informed decisions for themselves, even if others may not agree with those decisions.

What makes this even more frustrating is the inconsistency. Rhode Island is willing to allow products like kratom to remain legal for adults despite the fact that the long-term effects and potential harms are still not fully understood or well studied. Yet at the same time, the state continues pushing to ban menthol products that many adults have used for years, including as an alternative to cigarettes. These mixed messages leave many residents feeling that the government is picking and choosing which adult behaviors are acceptable rather than respecting personal responsibility and informed choice.

Rhode Island has already pushed many flavored vape consumers into neighboring states like Connecticut, where adults can still legally purchase the products they want. S2098 will simply push another group of consumers across state lines to spend their money elsewhere. This does not eliminate demand — it just moves tax revenue and business away from Rhode Island. At a time when local businesses are already struggling, it makes little sense to continue driving customers and revenue out of the state.

Prohibition-style policies rarely eliminate demand. Instead, they encourage out-of-state purchasing, online sales, and unregulated markets where there is less oversight and fewer safety protections.

Rather than imposing additional bans, the state should focus on enforcing age restrictions, preventing youth access, and supporting responsible regulation. Adults should still have the right to choose legal menthol products, especially when those products may help keep them away from combustible cigarettes.

I respectfully urge you to oppose S2098.

Thank you for your consideration.

Donna Dionne