

May 11, 2026

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma
Chairman, Senate Committee on Finance
Rhode Island Senate
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

SUBJECT: Opposition to S 2098.

Chair Louis P. DiPalma & Members of the Senate Finance Committee

The Progressive Policy Institute (PPI) thanks the committee for the opportunity to submit testimony in **opposition** to S 2098, a misguided bill that would prohibit the legal sale of menthol-flavored e-cigarettes.

PPI supports pragmatic, science-based policies that accelerate the end of smoking while ensuring youth nicotine use remains low. Quite simply, banning menthol e-cigarettes undermines adult smoking cessation, will further fuel the illicit tobacco market in Rhode Island, and will have no impact on youth use.

Don't Harm Adults Who Want to Quit Smoking

- Ten percent of adults in Rhode Island smoke cigarettes. Smoking is largely concentrated among working class and lower income adults, military veterans, and people who experience mental health and substance use challenges.
- Most adults want to quit smoking – and half will try to quit this year. Many will fail to quit if their focus is on abstinence from nicotine. This is unfortunate, but true.
- 40 percent of adults who smoke use menthol cigarettes. For these adults, menthol e-cigarettes are safer than smoking and represent a lifeline away from smoking.

Don't Force Adults to Purchase Menthol E-Cigarettes Illegally

- The thousands of Rhode Island adults who currently use menthol e-cigarettes aren't simply going to stop using them. They will find and purchase them from vape shops and other outlets that sell illegal, illicit products.
- The illicit nicotine marketplace is growing more sophisticated and dangerous, posing increasingly significant threats to both public health and public safety. Don't throw further fuel on that fire.

- State law should support the sale of products by responsible retailers who comply with all tobacco laws – including youth access laws and tobacco taxes.

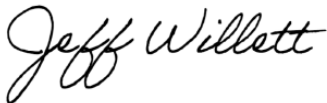
Don't Rationalize this Policy Believing it Will Affect Youth E-Cigarette Use

- In Rhode Island – and across the U.S., youth e-cigarette use has quickly and dramatically dropped. Youth use of all e-cigarette products – including menthol – continues to decline. That decline will continue without banning the legal sale of menthol products.
- Youth who use e-cigarettes do not obtain them in traditional brick and mortar stores. Banning the legal sale of menthol e-cigarettes will have no impact on the sources where youth actually obtain flavored e-cigarettes.

The current law that allows the legal sale of menthol e-cigarettes has been in effect for less than 17 months. There have been no crises or developments during that time that warrant banning their legal sale. Doing so will simply take currently legal products out of the hands of adult consumers – many of whom are likely former smokers. Tobacco control advocacy groups want you to help them “check a box” so they can list Rhode Island as a state that bans all flavored e-cigarettes – but there is no strong public health rationale for doing so.

We encourage you to oppose S 2098 to retain the sensible approach that is already established through Rhode Island law.

Respectfully,



Jeff Willett, Ph.D.

Director of the Project to End Smoking

Progressive Policy Institute

<https://www.progressivepolicy.org/project/project-to-end-smoking/>