



Mothers of the Movement
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October 15, 2019

Corey Johnson
Speaker, New York City Council
City Hall Office
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Johnson:

We appreciate your focus on reviewing the health effects of tobacco and e-cigarettes in young people. We urge you to pay very close attention to the unintended effects of a ban on menthol cigarettes and what it would mean in communities of color.

Both of us work with black youth throughout the country, including in New York City. We have seen the casualties of bad policies that have created unfortunate encounters with law enforcement.

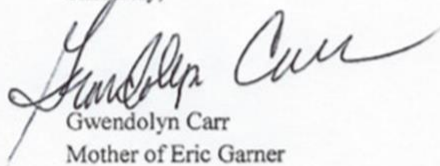
We urge you to carefully consider any bill that seeks to ban menthol cigarettes. We are concerned, because the majority - 80% - of black smokers prefer menthol cigarettes. When you ban a product sold mostly in black communities, you must consider the reality of what will happen to that very same over-represented community in the criminal justice system.

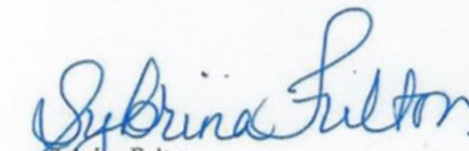
In no way do we encourage, support, or promote smoking. We are concerned that this ban will create a whole new market for loosies and reintroduce another version of stop-and-frisk in black financially-challenged communities where aggressive policing is a full reality and played out in national and local social media accounts every day. A ban will introduce or re-introduce many hard to employ young black New Yorkers to the criminal justice system. We do not want to take parents, sons, and daughters out of households for small infractions that carry financial obligations.

We ask that, at the same time you consider health issues, you look carefully at the criminal justice impact of such a change in health policy. Our community has had plenty of experience living under laws passed with the best of intentions. Banning only menthol cigarettes means that cigarettes preferred by black New Yorkers would be illegal; cigarettes preferred by non-black New Yorkers would be legal.

Small violations can quickly escalate to consequential events. We strongly encourage you not to create a second stop-and-frisk through your actions.

Sincerely,


Gwendolyn Carr
Mother of Eric Garner


Sybrina Fulton
Mother of Trayvon Martin
Creator, Circle of Mothers

cc: New York City Council