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March 4, 2025

Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
Oregon State Senate
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Support for Senate Bill 702

Dear Chair Reynolds, Vice Chair Anderson, and members of the Committee:

I am writing to you today as the Executive Director of Counter Tools, a national public health nonprofit that empowers communities to become healthier places for all. I write to officially ask you to support and pass Senate Bill 702 to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products to protect the health of Oregon kids.

As an organization that provides training and technical assistance to communities across the country, we have seen the deadly impact of flavors – both in addicting youth and in driving tobacco-related health disparities. Across the states we work with, we have seen clear evidence of the tobacco industry targeting youth with flavors. We know that over 80% of youth who have ever used tobacco started with a flavored product, and youth will use any flavor that remains on the market. Flavored tobacco and e-cigarette products are the tobacco industry’s current lure to hook young users, and it is working. E-cigarettes are the most popular tobacco product among Oregon teens, with over 10% of 11th graders using them in the past month.¹ E-cigarettes can deliver massive doses of nicotine, which put youth users at greater risk for addiction. Tobacco companies knowingly market harmful products to young users. Flavored products like cool mint, watermelon ice, and cotton candy attract and hook new young users. These tactics are working: nearly 90% of youth e-cigarette users use flavored products.²

In our work across the country, we have also seen tobacco companies targeting African Americans and other marginalized groups with menthol cigarettes. Menthol cigarettes make it easier for young people to start smoking, are more addictive and harder to quit. Recent research has found that between 1980 and 2018, menthol cigarettes slowed the decline of smoking prevalence by 2.6%, were responsible for 10.1 million extra smokers, 3 million life years lost, and 378,000 premature deaths. For decades, Big

¹ Oregon Health Authority, Oregon Student Health Survey.

² Results from the 2024 Annual National Youth Tobacco Survey

Tobacco has targeted youth, BIPOC, and queer communities with flavored products and misleading advertising about their safety, once again putting profits over people's health. We urge you to take the reasonable step to ending the sale of flavored tobacco to protect the health of Oregon kids and protect all communities across Oregon from the harm of flavored tobacco.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maria Kovell', written in a cursive style.

Maria Kovell, Executive Director
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