

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
ORDINANCE COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEARING  
MARCH 3, 2021**

**ATTENDANCE:** Marcus Brown, Co-chair; Rosalina Roman-Christy, Co-chair; Ernest Newton; Michelle Lyons; Avelino Silva

**OTHER:** Council President Aidee Nieves; Council Member(s): AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia, Matthew McCarthy & Jeanette Herron; Thomas Gaudett, Mayor's Office; Barbara; Carolan Gonzales; Domenic Vallera; Eddie Jamal; Edith Cassidy; jpruett; Kate Pain; Maria Ines; Michael Schoenfeld; Pete Spain; Rev. Lord, Greater Bridgeport NAACP President; Razel Branch; Sandra; Dominique Vallera; Michael Schoenfeld

This meeting was conducted by Zoom/Teleconference.

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called back into order at 5:32 P.M. by Co-chair Brown.

This is a continuance of a previously held meeting which was on Monday, March 1st, 2021. The Committee felt it was appropriate to allow for a continuation to allow the public additional time to voice their opinions on this item. Council Member Brown stated that people who had spoken previously on this item at the prior public hearing could not be allowed to speak again and this was for people who had not had the opportunity to speak. He clarified that, once a person began speaking, they would have three minutes to voice their opinion.

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE MUNICIPAL CODE OF ORDINANCES,  
AMEND CHAPTER 8.90 – REGULATION OF THE SALES AND MARKETING OF  
TOBACCO PRODUCTS. [21-20]**

**Mr. Razel** Branch of 207 Chamberlin Ave came forward to speak in favor of the ban on flavored tobacco products. He clarified that law enforcement will not be allowed to stop and question anyone in regards to their age or use or possession of said products. Additionally, they will not be allowed to punish anyone for purchasing said products, only the sale of them. They will also not be allowed to question where said products were obtained from. He also clarified that Bridgeport does have the authority to pass this ordinance and is spelled out in the City Charter in Chapter 8.90.020 subsection B which he recited for those present.

**Dominique Vallera** came forward to speak. He is representing Hassan Kash on behalf of AMH Convenience at 2098 Fairfield Ave in Bridgeport. He said it would not stop people from smoking and that they could order the products online or locally on the streets. It will not keep the products off the streets or out of the hands of minors and will just result in a black market for those products. In his eyes, city bans do not work. It will hurt business owners and result in a loss of profits. 60% of the cigarettes sold by the client are menthol which would be banned. Passing the ordinance will likely result in a loss of jobs from the client in order to remain functioning.

**Ms. Carolan Gonzalez** of 86 Pine Point Drive came forward to speak in favor of bill. She has founded, served, and worked with many organizations dedicated to improving the welfare of the community. The health of the citizens in both physical and environmental natures is important if they are to succeed. COVID 19 continues to highlight the economic and health disparities between the residents of Bridgeport and others in Connecticut. The ban on flavored tobacco is needed now. It remains the leading cause of preventable death in Connecticut and estimates say that 56,000 children alive today will die pre-maturely from smoking. Flavored tobacco products are still dangerous to a person's health and can lead a younger person towards tobacco addiction.

**Mr. Michael Schoenfeld** came forward to speak on behalf of Jamal who works at Omar's Market and resides at 1509 East Main Street to speak against the ban. He is unable to come forward to speak due to recovering from COVID and asked Mr. Schoenfeld to speak on his behalf. He would also like to speak on behalf of over 100 Bridgeport customers he has known personally over the past 30 years. He is one of the owners of Manchester Tobacco and Candy company which has operated from Manchester, Ct. for over the past 70 years. They are a legal, licensed, distributor that only sells to licensed stores and gas stations. He pointed out that the products they sell are legal and heavily regulated already. If the ban is passed, he argued, it would turn a legal, taxed, regulated, product into an illegal, untaxed, unregulated, product. He stated that this policy would not stop people from buying the same product in other towns, purchasing online, or purchasing through criminal connections. However, gas stations, convenience stores, and package stores to raise their prices as a result. The policy will eliminate jobs and make many 24-hour operations close early.

**Ms. Edith Cassidy** of 245 Ellsworth Street came forward to speak. She stated that before she worked as a pediatric practitioner she had worked in a general hospital. She took care of patients on ventilators who were suffering from lung and heart disease caused by smoking and not all were elderly. She noted that these products are targeted towards youth and frequently African-American youth according to the FDA. Up to 1.6 million African-American teens can begin to smoke and up to a third could die prematurely. The flavored tobacco product market is frequently targeted towards children and has its products sold close to candy racks. She also said she has worked in a neo-natal intensive care unit in the past and dealt with the children of moms who were addicted to nicotine. One of the possible outcomes of tobacco use by pregnant mothers is a severely underweight baby and neurological effects such as tremors. She is one of these babies and suffers from tremors to this day.

**A member of the public who works at 1925 Boston Ave.** came forward to speak over the phone. He claimed that making the tobacco products illegal would result in an illegal black market for the product and criminal activity. It would also lead to bootleg versions of the product being made that could be made from anything. The sale of tobacco products to anyone under the age of 21 is already illegal. If the ban goes through, he feels he will likely need to fire employees to remain profitable.

**Ms. Lisa Sheppard** of 141 Indian Ave. came forward to speak against bill. She pointed out that it would disproportionately affect African-American communities with menthol cigarettes being the preferred choice of 80% of African Americans who choose to smoke cigarettes. A ban on these cigarettes would give the police another reason to interact negatively with minority groups for low-level, non-violent, offenses. These can easily lead to tragic results. She pointed out that people under 21 are already banned from purchasing cigarettes. She believes that enacting this

ban would result in a racially-discriminatory process and lead to increased crime, targeted enforcement, unfair treatment, and illegal street sales.

**Ms. Renada Johnson** of 141 Holly Street came forward to speak in opposition to the proposed ban. She opposed punitive laws that disproportionately affect African-Americans. Menthol cigarettes are the preferred cigarette by African Americans. A ban on menthol cigarettes would give police a reason to interact negatively with retailers and citizens. She pointed out that it is already illegal to buy tobacco products if you are under the age of 21 and the ban will disproportionately impact African-American smokers.

**Ms. Dashauna Williams** came forward to speak. She currently attends Bassick High School and is currently in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. She stated her opposition to flavored tobacco products due to their cancer-causing ability. She stated that people her age use them frequently and buy them from gas stations which don't card their customers.

**A resident of 49 Waterman Street** came forward to speak over the phone. She stated she was opposed to the proposed ban. She opposes punitive law which disproportionately targets African-Americans. She then repeated that adults should be free to choose and this would result in police interacting negatively with African-Americans on a more frequent basis.

**Ms. Nichola Hall** who lives at 105 Pond Street came forward to speak in favor of bill. She stated that this bill would ban the sale of all flavored tobacco products and this was needed as it was about saving lives. She is tired about hearing arguments about how the ban will have economic impacts when there are lives at stake. It is ridiculous to compare kids lives to money. It will not prevent anyone of legal age from purchasing a flavored tobacco product outside of Bridgeport or a non-flavored tobacco product in Bridgeport to a person of legal age.

**Mr. Michael Harris** of 141 Newton Ave came forward to speak. He opposes the ban of flavored tobacco products as it will have a disproportionate effect on African-Americans. It will give police another reason to interact negatively with the African-American community. He pointed out that all residents under the age of 21 are already banned from purchasing cigarettes. He believes banning the flavored cigarettes is another racially discriminatory practice that will harm African-American citizens. It leads to increased crime, targeted enforcement and unfair treatment.

**Dr. Lesly J. Valbrun** came forward to speak in favor of bill. He pointed out that tobacco in any form is an addictive drug. He stated that it can be a bigger threat economically to a community than we think. While there will be an immediate economic impact the long-term impact is more important. One of the health issues in Connecticut is people with chronic illness because of their use of menthol cigarettes and e-cigarettes. Individuals are going to be impacted in a negative way down-the-line. We need to make sure that we are not promoting this to younger people. Young people start smoking before the age of 21 or 18. It does not make long-term sense to sell menthol cigarettes or e-cigarettes to anyone and this should be the initiative.

**Mr. Ali** calling from a Shell Station at 440 Main Street Bridgeport and he strongly opposes the bill. He operates in two business locations with 8 employees. If the ban were to go into effect, he would lose his job and his employees would lose their jobs. We cannot stop people from smoking tobacco products by banning it. There are various locations and resources where people

can easily gain access to the products. He stated that there was a false narrative from the people who support the bill of it being about money vs. health. They are standing on the emotional side and the retailers are on the logical side. He questioned how the bill could stop people from smoking when they could buy from other locations. The only solution is to educate people about the harmfulness of tobacco and encourage them to stay away from it. This will take time. He pointed out that, if there is no demand, there is no supply.

There was one final person who raised their hand to speak but did not do so after being invited to do so by the Committee.

There was no one else who wished to speak at this time.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Co-chair Brown adjourned the Public Hearing at 6:19 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ian A. Soltes  
Telesco Secretarial Services