

INGLEWOOD AREA MINISTER'S ASSOCIATION

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Jim Wood, Chair
Assembly Health Committee
Room 6026 State Capitol
Sacramento, California 95818

CC. Senator Jerry Hill
Assembly Health Committee Members

Dear Assemblymember Wood,



Let me start by saying that my opposition to SB793 has nothing to do with the health risks associated with smoking. If it were my choice, no one would smoke. But that's just it. It's not my choice. Nor can we legislate the choices of those whose choice it is.

My problem with the bill is that there is no plan in place for the millions of African Americans who do smoke should this bill pass into law other than to criminalize their addictions to smoking.

We all know that the vast majority of those who smoke have tried to quit and one would have thought that the cigarette taxes that drove the prices way up would have been a deterrent, but to think that legislating away their choice would do it like magic is as unrealistic as the notion that they won't seek to satisfy their nicotine fix wherever they can find it.

If it were a simple matter of health risks, what about alcohol? Are we going to criminalize that given that not only are the health risks just as lethal, but the behavioral changes in those who drink too much have a dramatic impact on spousal and child abuse and violence in our communities? I don't know of anyone who smokes a cigarette and then goes out and beats his wife.

(Besides, as history has shown, prohibition just doesn't work).

We fought against the legislation that legitimized the use of marijuana—and many of us faith leaders still see it as a gateway drug with just as severe implications to our communities—but it appears that California either couldn't win that war or wanted to tax it instead.

And what of the fiscal consequences? Many of the folks in my neighborhood benefit from the monies raised from cigarette taxes through programs like First 5. Are you going to take that away from them in the middle of a pandemic and, if so, what will you replace it with?

In retrospect, it doesn't appear that much thought was given to the consequences of the passage of such a bill. Are the members of my communities who do smoke any less deserving of such consideration?

There is little upside to criminalizing the use, sale and possession of menthol cigarettes when in anticipation of bans such as these, tobacco companies are already coming up with alternative products and street retailers will be just as innovative, which would make the very action you're taking moot with the exception of this:

- The loss of income to community retailers who now legally sell it;
- The numbers of youth like the Rancho Cordova 14-year old who may be stopped and perhaps even abused because of it; or become involved in the illicit trade of it;
- Another possible Eric Garner tragedy; and
- The loss of revenues to programs that now benefit the Black community;

None of the above outcomes can be considered as positive which is why I find myself on the other side of a bill that in principle I might have agreed with. In moving forward, my only request is that you amend your bill with

regards to menthol cigarettes and instead key in on concrete resources that might work to reduce smoking in the African American community.

Bishop R. Terrell Douglas, Sr.

Regards,

Bishop R. Terrell Douglas, Sr., President, Inglewood Ministerial Alliance
Pastor, Jacob's Ladder Community Fellowship
Overseer, Central California District Council