Swedish Match

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TO: Senate Health and Human Services Chairperson Melissa Wiklund and Members of the Committee

FROM: Dr. Brian E. Erkkila, Director of Regulatory Science, Swedish Match North America

Swedish Match North America is providing the following testimony on S.F. 2123 with regards to a total category flavor ban on all tobacco products.

At Swedish Match our vision is "A world without cigarettes" and to that end we manufacture products which help adults who smoke move to products which reduce their risks. It was with this vision in mind that we developed our General Snus products which the FDA Center for Tobacco Products determined were appropriate for public health and allowed us to inform consumers that switching to our products can reduce the risk of cancer, heart and respiratory disease. The FDA evaluation of General Snus products by dozens of the Center's experienced scientists noted that the General snus products, including flavored products, not only were less harmful than cigarettes but that they were not likely to entice non-users, including youth, to initiate use of the products. This decision was in line with the FDA's position that a "continuum of risk" across tobacco products with cigarettes being the most harmful and reduced-risk products (e.g. electronic-cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, nicotine pouches) being much less risky. If S.F. 2123 were to be enacted these federally vetted flavored products would no longer be available to people who smoke in Minnesota.

In the United States there are ~30 million people who smoke and this ultimately leads to the death of ~480,000 Americans each year. Minnesota has made great strides in reducing the impact of cigarette smoking with a record low prevalence of smoking, however over 6,300 Minnesotans still lose their lives each year. However, for the hundreds of thousands of people who smoke in Minnesota, S.F. 2123 would essentially eliminate a majority of reduced risk alternatives available leaving them at elevated risk for death and disease through continued smoking. Among adults who want to stop using combusted products the flavor and sensory experience of non-tobacco flavored alternative products are one of the main characteristics which make them an appealing product to switch to, leaving behind the taste and smell of combusted tobacco.

Since 2019 the FDA Center for Tobacco Products has been reviewing millions of pre-market tobacco applications and has denied marketing to ~99% drastically reducing the number of tobacco harm reduction products on the market. Also during this time the federal age limit for purchasing tobacco was raised to 21 and FDA/CDC data indicate that use of tobacco products by youth was reduced by >50% and reached record lows. In order to accelerate reductions in tobacco-related disease the focus should be not only providing people who smoke acceptable alternatives but to ensure that adults are appropriately informed about the continuum of risk. This can be done in concert with marketing and age verification policies to minimize the risk of youth using these products.

In an environment where FDA review permits only products deemed appropriate for the protection of public health (users AND non-users), where youth tobacco use rates are in precipitous decline, and hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans continue to smoke combusted products we strongly urge you to reject S.F. 2123 in its current form.

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