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Senate Health and Welfare Committee

Testimony: H.217, Workplace smoke-free policies

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**In Support of H.217:
Reducing Secondhand Smoke Exposure in Vermont**

There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke:

- Just 30 minutes of exposure to secondhand smoke changes blood chemistry and increases the risk of heart disease in non-smokers.
- Your risk of lung cancer, heart attack or stroke is increased by 20-30 percent when exposed to secondhand smoke.
- Approximately 185 men and 161 women die from lung cancer annually.
- In 2014, Vermont's smoking-attributable economic costs have risen to approximately \$434 million and 830 Vermonters died from smoking-related health problems.
- 10-20% of smokers quit smoking as a result of smokefree legislation in their workplace. Passing smokefree legislation would help to reduce the state's burden associated with smoker's health care costs.

Vermont is a national leader on protecting Vermonters from secondhand smoke (SHS) exposure:

- Vermont led the nation when it passed the Smokefree Workplace Act in 1987 and most indoor worksites became smoke free. In 2009, the law was amended to eliminate a loophole that allowed designated smoking areas in the workplace.
- In 1993, Vermont passed the Clean Indoor Air Act to protect Vermonters from secondhand smoke in public places. In 2005, the law was amended to remove the cabaret exemption and protect workers at bars, cabarets and private clubs.

Vermonters are still exposed to SHS:

- 17.9% of adults in Vermont reported exposure to SHS in indoor or outdoor areas at work and 23.6% said they were exposed to SHS in public places.

Vermont has an opportunity this year to expand protection from SHS exposure:

- H.217 proposes to close the final loophole in the Smokefree Workplace Act by banning smoking in hotels, motels and resorts;

- Creating a 25-ft. smoke-free zone around all state-owned buildings and prohibiting smoking on the grounds of any hospital or secure residential recovery facility owned or operated by the state (applies to the new State Hospital in Berlin);
- Banning smoking in vehicles in the presence of children required to be in a federally-approved car seat, usually used up to age 8.
- H.217 also codifies regulations that prohibits tobacco substitutes (e-cigarettes) on public school grounds, public school sponsored events and daycare facilities. It also codifies regulations that allows the Department of Forests and Parks to designate smoke-free areas.

H.217 would protect hotel employees, hotel guests, state employees and state visitors from dangerous levels of toxins and reduce fire risk:

- Smoke doesn't stay in a hotel room; it moves through microscopic cracks in walls and floors and concentrates in the floors above the smoker; up to 65% air is exchanged between units.
- There is a growing body of evidence regarding "third-hand smoke," as particles from tobacco smoke linger for months in the air, stick on surfaces in homes and cars, and can be absorbed through the skin.
- Smoke can seep in and out of windows and doors, both opened and closed. The State can serve as a role model by protecting every state employee from SHS by creating a 25-ft buffer around the exit and entrances of state buildings.
- Six Vermonters have died due to fires caused by smoking materials in the last five years and in 2012, a burning cigarette caused \$1 million in damage to a Williston hotel.

This legislation is a critical tool in Vermont's efforts to reduce health care spending by helping prevent cancer, heart attacks and other smoking-related diseases. It also protects children from secondhand smoke and assists in shifting societal norms away from smoking and tobacco use.

Please let me know if you need further information. Thank you.