

Good Morning. I am Stephanie Winters and I represent the American Academy of Pediatrics Vermont Chapter, Vermont Academy of Family Physicians and the Vermont Medical Society.

We are in support of H.217 and any legislation that protects Vermonters from secondhand smoke and its effects. Most specifically, I am speaking in strong support of banning smoking in vehicles in the presence of a minor. I am coming to you today as a voice for children.

There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Exposure to secondhand smoke is especially dangerous for children because their organs and immune system are still developing. Exposure slows lung development and can damage a child's lungs for life. Secondhand smoke exposure puts children at risk for vascular damage, ear infections and sudden infant death. Even at low levels secondhand smoke impairs a child's ability to learn with more than 21.9 million children estimated to be at risk of reading deficiencies due to secondhand smoke.

With all of these harmful, life altering effects and the fact that secondhand smoke in cars reaches dangerously high levels in as short a time as 5 minutes, there is no questions that we need to act to protect the children of Vermont by prohibiting smoking in vehicles with minors.

I will end with a personal story from a FAHC pediatric resident about a patient she cared for:

"My patient came in to the hospital for a very simple procedure – to have tubes put in his ears. This is a common procedure done for children who have repeat ear infections. Incidentally, secondhand smoke exposure is a major risk factor for developing ear infections. He should have been able to go home that day without any problems. Instead, he had to have his breathing tube put back in, and was on a breathing machine in the PICU for a week. While he was in recovery after the procedure, he developed respiratory distress and couldn't get air into his lungs. I examined him at that time, and I noticed that his grandmother and his mother were alternating holding him so that the other could go out to smoke. They and their clothing smelled strongly of cigarettes. I am sure that his exposure to second hand smoke contributed to, and perhaps even caused, his situation."

Thank you and I hope that you will join myself and the physicians of Vermont in protecting our children and keeping them healthy and safe.