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Dear Senator Stedman:

Please consider holding SB 209 from any further progress through the legislative process. As a wholesale company started in Ketchikan, Northern Sales employs Alaskans all over the state.

We oppose SB 209 as an unnecessary intrusion into the autonomy of Alaska communities. Ketchikan, for example, has enjoyed the ability to determine for itself--without a State-ordered mandate--whether to allow smoking in workplace buildings. The communities you represent should continue to exercise local control over issues that affect them, wherever possible. This bill constitutes a direct affront to this idea.

In addition, the inclusion of electronic cigarettes as exactly the same thing as a real cigarette is disingenuous and inappropriate. If this bill moves from your committee, it should be amended to remove the inclusion of e-cigarettes from the ban.

E-cigarettes are not cigarettes at all; they contain no tobacco. The notion that they are placed on exactly the same level as tobacco cigarettes, and pose the same risks, is absurd. To the contrary, there is growing scientific and anecdotal evidence that e-cigarettes are very effective substitutes for many addicted, chronic cigarette smokers. They should be encouraged, not forbidden. If the public health community really wants to save lives in Alaska, they should be thrilled that people have started to explore alternatives to real cigarettes. Instead, dogmatic thought, hatred of Big Tobacco, and emotional hysteria have replaced good science and rational thought. Anyone who believes in saving lives should be the first in line to promote these new alternatives to smoking.

In addition, Alaska and 40 other states have asked the FDA to issue findings and regulations on e-cigarettes, which is expected any time now. Alaska is acting prematurely and will surely create complications and confusing regulations by jumping into this arena too soon. Let the science come out and act accordingly at that time. That is the proper role of government. Less is more. Alaska would be only the 4th state to include e-cigarettes in the smoking ban. We should be among the last to act in this area, not the first. Government should intrude as little as possible into people's lives. Please amend the bill to remove any reference to e-cigarettes if you must move the bill from your Committee.

Sincerely,

Cliff Kraemer
V.P. of Sales – Northern Sales Co.