



Supporters call for Alaska lawmakers to expand smoke-free workplace laws

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(SitNews) Anchorage, Alaska - Supporters of the Alaska Smoke-Free Indoor Workplace bill (SB209) sent the message to lawmakers last Thursday that it's time for Alaska to have statewide smoke-free laws. The proposed law got a hearing yesterday with the Senate State Affairs Committee at the Capitol in Juneau.

If enacted SB209 will prohibit smoking in all indoor workplaces, businesses and public spaces. Individuals who choose to smoke will have to "take it outside" in order to protect others from the effects of secondhand smoke. The bill was introduced by Senator Peter Micciche in the Senate and Representative Lindsey Holmes in the House (HB360).

A coalition of Alaskan advocacy groups – American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, the Alaska Native Health Board, and AARP – are urging lawmakers to vote yes for the bill, to protect the health and safety of all workers and business patrons from secondhand smoke.

Though a self-described "man of small government," Sen. Micciche testified that, "... like vehicle safety and car seats, [secondhand smoke prevention] is a public health and safety issue that government has a role in."

"More than 400 businesses and organizations have stated their support of this bill, signing resolutions that they do want smoke-free workplaces as the statewide standard," stated Sen. Micciche in his testimony.

Dr. Bob Urata, a Juneau physician and American Heart Association volunteer, testified during the hearing that the dangers of secondhand smoke are well established. "Secondhand smoke kills nearly 50,000 people in the United States every year. The 2006 U.S. Surgeon General's report found that brief secondhand smoke exposure can have an immediate adverse effect on the cardiovascular system."

Breathing secondhand smoke interferes with the normal functioning of the heart, blood, and vascular systems in ways that increase the risk of having a heart attack. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, even brief exposure to secondhand smoke can damage the lining of blood vessels and cause your blood

platelets to become stickier. These changes can cause a deadly heart attack or stroke.

SB209 would also restrict the use of controversial electronic cigarettes in indoor spaces, asking users to take it outside for the health of others. Opponents of the bill, notably the Tobacco Industry, argue that e-cigarettes do not produce smoke like traditional cigarettes and emit "harmless water vapors" instead. However, Marge Stoneking, Alaska Director of the American Lung Association, testified that, "E-cigarette secondhand aerosol has been found to contain ultrafine particulates, heavy metals, and volatile organic compounds, which are risks for lung cancer, in addition to nicotine."

Currently only half of Alaska's population is covered by a local smoke-free workplace law. The bill passed out of committee and will be heard again on Monday in the Senate Health and Social Services Committee.

On the Web:

Learn more about the Alaska Smoke-Free Indoor Workplaces effort
www.SmokeFreeAlaska.com

Source of News:

American Lung Association

Cancer Action Network

American Heart Association

AARP

American Stroke Association

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