



March 22, 2016

Representative Paul Seaton
Representative Liz Vazquez
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Dear Representatives Seaton and Vasquez:

On behalf of the Mat-Su Health Foundation and its Board of Directors, I am writing to express support for HB328, which will provide comprehensive protection from secondhand smoke and e-cigarette aerosol for employees and customers in all workplaces and public places statewide.

Despite progress in the last several years, Alaska still has some of the highest tobacco use rates in the nation, and this costs Alaska \$579 million annually in direct medical costs and lost productivity due to tobacco-related death. Passage of HB328 will help reduce these costs and will also reduce Medicaid costs, an objective that many Alaskans share. Most importantly, it will add years of precious life for many Alaskans.

A recent analysis of 11 studies encompassing more than 2.5 million births and nearly 250,000 asthma attacks found that the number of premature births and children's hospital visits for asthma dropped 10% in parts of the United States, Canada and Europe barely a year after they enacted smoking bans. Why? Because strong smoke free laws change social norms about smoking and actually lead to more people implementing smoke-free policies in their own homes and that's one of the reasons why smoke free policies have such a direct impact on child's health. Medicaid is the payor source for the majority of babies born in Mat-Su at Mat-Su Regional and across much of Alaska. You can look at the cost of Medicaid asthma admissions and premature births see what a 10% drop in these admissions would save Alaska the very next year after the law is in place. You care very deeply about the health and welfare of our children, and HB328 helps to protect them. An earlier analysis of the impact of smoking bans on adult health demonstrated a 15% reduction in cardiovascular events. Every community that has instituted these smoking bans has seen a decrease in heart attacks.

Alaska needs a robust clean indoor air statute, and one that includes e-cigarettes. Adolescents perceive e-cigarettes as safer than traditional cigarettes, but let's address the myths that these products are safer or that they are a cessation tool. They are the opposite—they are a grooming tool, grooming kids to accept, like, and become dependent on smoking and nicotine. Recent research indicates that youth who try e-cigs are much more likely than other youth to progress to traditional cigarettes. In fact, a 2015 National Institutes of Health report showed that 9th graders who used e-cigs were over three times more likely to start using combustible tobacco products than those who didn't use e-cigs.

Keep in mind, too, that e-cigarettes have not been approved by the FDA as a smoking cessation aide. While some individuals have quit smoking tobacco by using them, studies indicate that e-cigs may not be helpful at the population level. Many people become "stable dual-users" who use both traditional cigarettes and electronic cigarettes. The aerosol in e-cigarettes contains many substances, including nicotine, ultrafine particles, volatile organic compounds and toxins known to cause cancer. There is enough peer-reviewed, published scientific evidence to determine that second-hand aerosol is not harmless. Including e-cigs in Alaska's smoke-free



workplace law does not prohibit people from using these unregulated products, rather they simply must step outside to use them, just like people do to smoke cigarettes.

Only half of Alaskans are protected by smoke-free workplace laws. Many jurisdictions, such as the Mat-Su Borough, do not have the health powers necessary to pass an area-wide smoke-free law. HB328 is the next step in further reducing smoking rates and secondhand smoke exposure in Alaska. It's the next step in raising the health status of all Alaskans. The Mat-Su Health Foundation Board unanimously supports this bill and respectfully asks you to expedite its passage.

Sincerely,

Executive Director

Cc: Rep. Neal Foster, Rep. Louis Stutes, Rep. David Talerico, Rep. Geran Tarr, Rep. Adam Wool