



July 11, 2019

The Honorable Dick Durbin  
 United States Senate  
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
 United States Senate  
 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Durbin and Collins:

We write in strong support of your legislation to make Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities smoke-free. Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S., killing more than 480,000 Americans each year, and the scientific evidence on the health risks associated with secondhand smoke is clear, convincing, and overwhelming.

The Surgeon General has determined there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, and sick and disabled veterans should not be subjected to secondhand smoke in order to receive medical care. As a nation, we must do more to improve and protect the health of our veterans. Ensuring a smoke-free VHA system for our veterans and those who serve them is an important step in the right direction.

Cigarette smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals and compounds. Hundreds are toxic and at least 69 cause cancer. A December 2016 U.S. Surgeon General report found that “e-cigarette aerosol is not harmless and can contain harmful and potentially harmful constituents, including nicotine.” The only effective way to protect people from secondhand smoke is to provide 100

percent smoke-free air. Designated smoking rooms, expensive ventilation systems and similar partial approaches do not protect people from the dangers of secondhand smoke.

People with heart and lung disease are at higher risk for health complications if they are exposed to secondhand smoke. According to a 2015 health survey of veteran enrollees' health, of the 5.7 million users of VHA services in 2014, 5.2 percent, or nearly 300,000, had COPD; 25.5 percent, or nearly 1.5 million, had hypertension; and 7.7 percent, or nearly 439,000, had coronary artery disease. These former service members will benefit more than most as a result of your bill.

Recognizing the harm caused by tobacco smoke, the VHA announced in June 2019 that it will make all VHA facilities smoke-free by October 1, 2019. The directive brings VHA in line with policies long since adopted by many Department of Defense and many private health care facilities. Your legislation gives this directive the force of law and will protect current and future generations of veterans from the risks of secondhand smoke when they seek care at a VHA facility.

We appreciate your leadership on this issue and look forward to the improved health that veterans will enjoy as a result of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Action on Smoking & Health  
Allergy & Asthma Network  
American Academy of Family Physicians  
American Academy of Oral and  
Maxillofacial Pathology  
American Association for Cancer Research  
American Association for Dental Research  
American Association for Respiratory Care  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action  
Network  
American College of Cardiology  
American College of  
Neuropsychopharmacology  
American Heart Association  
American Lung Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Public Health Association  
American Society of Addiction Medicine  
American Thoracic Society  
Association of Schools and Programs of  
Public Health  
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids  
Cancer Prevention and Treatment Fund  
Catholic Health Association of the United  
States

ClearWay Minnesota  
Counter Tools  
Eta Sigma Gamma – National Health  
Education Honorary  
March of Dimes  
National Association of County Health  
Officials  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse  
Practitioners  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Network of Public Health Institutes  
Oncology Nursing Society  
Prevent Cancer Foundation  
Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and  
Interventions  
Society for Research On Nicotine and  
Tobacco  
The Society of State Leaders of Health and  
Physical Education  
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons  
Trust for America's Health



July 11, 2019

The Honorable Brad Wenstrup  
 United States House of Representatives  
 Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kathleen Rice  
 United States House of Representatives  
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Wenstrup and Rice:

We write in strong support of your legislation to make Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities smoke-free. Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S., killing more than 480,000 Americans each year, and the scientific evidence on the health risks associated with secondhand smoke is clear, convincing, and overwhelming.

The Surgeon General has determined there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, and sick and disabled veterans should not be subjected to secondhand smoke in order to receive medical care. As a nation, we must do more to improve and protect the health of our veterans. Ensuring a smoke-free VHA system for our veterans and those who serve them is an important step in the right direction.

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