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June 11, 2019

Sent via email

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
B234 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Phil Roe, MD
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
3460 O'Neill House Office Building
Washington, DC 20024

The Honorable Brad Wenstrup
U.S. House of Representatives
2419 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kathleen Rice
U.S. House of Representatives
2345 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: The Prohibit Smoking in VHA Facilities Act

Dear Chairman Takano, Congressman Roe, Congressman Wenstrup, and Congresswoman Rice,

On behalf of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS), I am pleased to write in support of this bipartisan legislation, The Prohibit Smoking in Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Facilities Act, which would make facilities of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) smoke-free. Founded in 1964, The Society of Thoracic Surgeons is a not-for-profit organization representing more than 7,600 surgeons, researchers, and allied health care professionals worldwide who are dedicated to ensuring the best possible outcomes for surgeries of the heart, lungs, and esophagus, as well as other surgical procedures within the chest. The mission of the Society is to enhance the ability of cardiothoracic surgeons to provide the highest quality patient care through education, research, and advocacy.

This bill would protect sick and disabled veterans by ensuring that no one in VHA facilities is exposed to secondhand smoke and prohibit current smokers from smoking while they are at a VHA facility. In 2017, the VHA provided 971 outdoor designated smoking areas and 15 indoor designated smoking areas. The Surgeon General has determined there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, and cardiothoracic surgeons recommend patients stop smoking before surgery to, enhance heart and lung functionality, and reduce the chance of infection. Your legislation is an important step towards ensuring that our nation's veterans receive the best possible care, and are not exposed to first or secondhand smoke at VHA facilities.

STS remains fully committed to improving the quality, safety, and efficiency of care for all patients, particularly for the men and women who served our nation. Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. Please contact Courtney Yohe Savage, STS Director of Government Relations, at cyohe@sts.org or 202-787-1230 should you need additional information or clarification. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Robert S.D. Higgins, MD
President