SMOKE-FREE TEXAS

HEALTH AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

SAMPLE LETTER: SENATE BILL 670 AND HOUSE BILL 355

Dear Senator/Representative:

Please support a Smoke-Free Texas as purposed by SB670 (HB355). As you well know, the cost for health care has a major impact on the Texas Budget. I know you are facing major challenges in addressing the States’ budget deficit while minimizing cuts to education, and critical social and health safety net services. A statewide Smoke-Free law would save the Texas economy $218 Million Annually, including:

* More than $54 million in reduced health care costs to nonsmokers that would no longer be exposed to secondhand smoke.
* More than $71 million in reduced health care costs for smokers who quit as a result of the law.
* More than $77 million in productivity cost savings for the state’s economy.
* More than $16 million in medical costs would be averted from low birth weight births in areas of Texas with only partial or no smoke-free workplace legislation.

Most Texans favor making all workplaces, restaurants and bars in the state smoke-free, 90% agree that all workers should be protected from exposure to secondhand smoke in the workplace. Among African Americans and Latinos, 61% and 71% respectively agree with smoke-free work site protection. Yet in 2009, only 37% of Texas municipal populations were covered by comprehensive smoke-free policies.

Exposure to second-hand smoke is not a matter of personal choice as some would argue. In fact, choice is more often limited or reduced when we have few options to work and enjoy leisure activities in facilities in which smoking is allowed. Texas Latinos have a disproportionate greater likelihood of being exposed to second-hand smoke in the workplace, and the lack of smoke-free regulations also makes it a worker’s right and safety issue. Illnesses and absenteeism caused by tobacco use and exposure can be reduced by smoke-free policies. We know that:

* Tobacco Clean-Air policies do not affect restaurant revenue or the sale of alcoholic beverages in bars, according to analysis of sales tax data in Texas and other states.
* There is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke, according to the U.S. Surgeon General.
* Smoke-free workplace laws immediately and notably improved heart health (including fewer heart attack hospitalizations), particularly in nonsmokers, according to studies in numerous states and countries.
* 31 cities in Texas already have comprehensive smoke-free ordinances.

Most Texans know that smoking and second-hand smoke are a major cause of premature deaths, chronic health problems, and high health care costs. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, each year 53,000 non-smokers die from second-hand smoke. In Texas, an estimated 24,000 people die from smoking attributable illnesses.

Let’s not add more chronic health problems and high health care costs to our State Budget problems.

Let’s make Texas a Tobacco Clean Air state.

Thank you for your service and support of SB670 (HB355).