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EDITORIAL

Weakening Ohio's Smoke-Free Workplace Law a Step Backward for Public Health

HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO – The Smoke-Free Workplace Law was supported by nearly 60% of Ohio's voters in 2006. It was an important step to protect workers and customers from the devastating effects of secondhand tobacco smoke. It also enacted a statewide standard rather than a city by city or business by business approach to smoking policies. At Hamilton County Public Health, we feel weakening Ohio's Smoke-Free Workplace Law would be a tremendous step backward for public health.

Weakening the law would undermine the will of Ohio voters and compromise the health of the general public. Changing the law would leave thousands of Ohio workers – including those who work at bars – exposed to the damaging effects of secondhand smoke in the workplace and patrons unable to enjoy a meal out without breathing in cigarette smoke. Creating exemptions for bars, family-owned businesses or outdoor patios would treat businesses differently and pick and choose which employees deserve protection from secondhand smoke. Exposure to secondhand smoke causes approximately 35,000 heart disease deaths and 3,000 lung cancer deaths among nonsmokers in the United States every year.

This law is vital for employee health: it protects workers and the public from the health hazards associated with exposure to secondhand smoke from tobacco. Secondhand smoke is a known health hazard of which there is no safe level of exposure. There are more than 4,000 chemicals in secondhand smoke; many of which are toxic and cause cancer, heart disease, lung disease, and other health problems.

This law is working. At Hamilton County Public Health, we find the majority of places are complying with the law voluntarily. Complaints made against Hamilton County establishments have decreased steadily since the law went into effect. In 2009 complaints were down 58% compared with 2008. Of the nearly 2,100 restaurants, bars and other facilities licensed by Hamilton County Public Health, only 4% have been found in violation of the smoke-free workplace law.

Ohio's smoke-free law is just asking the smoker to step outside – a small inconvenience in order to prevent a case of cancer or a heart disease death. Research also shows that smoke free laws are an incentive for preventing people from starting to smoke and



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persuading existing smokers to quit. Ohioans should take pride in having put in place one of the most progressive public health measures in the country.

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