



June 7, 2021

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 fully smoke-free. Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, 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 U.S. 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 as they seek 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 and secondhand e-cigarette aerosol 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 or emissions.

People with heart and lung disease are at higher risk for health complications if they are exposed to secondhand smoke. According to projections, in 2021 9.3%, or 568,000, of VHA patients will have COPD, 60.1%, or close to 3.7 million, will have hypertension, and 15.8%, or 972,000, will have ischemic heart 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 in 2019 determined that exposure to secondhand smoke creates unacceptable medical risks and issued directives making all VHA facilities smoke-free effective October 1, 2019. These directives bring 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

African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council

Allergy & Asthma Network

American Academy of Dental Group Practice

American Academy of Family Physicians

American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology

American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology

American Association for Cancer Research (AACR)

American Association for Dental Research (AADR)

American Association for Respiratory Care

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

American College of Cardiology

American College of Physicians

American Dental Association

American Dental Education Association

American Heart Association

American Lung Association

American Medical Association

American Public Health Association

American Society of Addiction Medicine
American Thoracic Society
Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights
Association for Clinical Oncology (ASCO)
Association for the Treatment of Tobacco Use and Dependence
Association of Black Cardiologists
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Big Cities Health Coalition
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
Cancer Prevention and Treatment Fund
Center for Black Equity
CHEST (American College of Chest Physicians)
ClearWay Minnesota
Community Anti- Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)
Eta Sigma Gamma – National Health Education Honorary
Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA)
International Association for the Study of Lung Cancer
LUNGeity Foundation
March of Dimes
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of Social Workers
National LGBT Cancer Network
National Medical Association
National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI)
Oncology Nursing Society
Parents Against Vaping e-cigarettes (PAVe)
Public Health Solutions
Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions
Society for Research on Nicotine & Tobacco
The Society for State Leaders of Health and Physical Education
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons