



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