



May 9, 2024

The Honorable Marvin Abney
 Chair, House Committee on Finance
 Rhode Island House of Representatives
 82 Smith Street
 Providence, RI 02903

SUBJECT: Support for House Bill 7500

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee:

Our organizations appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 7500 by Representative Tanzi. This vital legislation would make Rhode Island’s casinos smoke-free by repealing the exemption they were granted in the Public Health and Workplace Safety Act. Rhode Island needs to stop gambling with the health of our casino workers. **A brave group of casino employees has taken a stand against the harmful, smoke-filled work environment that they endure every day, and we strongly support their efforts. We hope the committee will, too.**

Casino gaming is the only industry in Rhode Island that is permitted to jeopardize the health of its employees by allowing smoking indoors. During the pandemic, the gaming floors were smoke-free and patrons who wished to smoke had to do so outside. That temporary smoke-free policy has come to an end and employees are once again being exposed to the harmful chemicals in secondhand smoke.

People who use tobacco are not the only ones who breathe the deadly smoke – everyone around them is forced to inhale it too. Secondhand smoke causes nearly 41,000 deaths, including up to 7,300 lung cancer deaths among nonsmoking adults each year in the United States.^{i,ii} Exposure to secondhand smoke causes many of the same tobacco-related diseases as active smoking, including heart disease, stroke, and cancer.ⁱⁱⁱ In addition, secondhand smoke increases the risk for sudden infant death

syndrome (SIDS), acute respiratory infections, ear problems, and more severe asthma.^{iv} **Multiple Surgeon General's reports have confirmed that the scientific evidence indicates there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke.**^{v vi}

The rest of Rhode Island's hospitality industry is smoke-free – and has been for more than 18 years. It is unfair to prioritize the casino industry over the health concerns of hard-working employees who have been ignored for too long.

Twenty states and territories, including New York and Massachusetts, already prohibit smoking in casinos.^{vii} Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods in Connecticut have remained smoke-free post-pandemic.

Rhode Island's casino employees deserve equality. It's time to address this injustice and close the casino loophole once and for all. Everyone should have the right to breathe clean air where they work. We urge you to recommend passage of House Bill 7500.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics – Rhode Island Chapter
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Heart Association
American Lung Association
American Nonsmokers' Rights
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
CODAC Behavioral Healthcare
Nurse Practitioner Alliance of Rhode Island
Oasis International – Providence, RI
Open Door Health
Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation
Rhode Island Nurses Association
Rhode Island Pharmacists Association
Rhode Island Public Health Institute
Rhode Island Student Assistance Services
Rhode Island Society of Health-System Pharmacists

For additional information please contact:

Megan Tucker, American Heart Association, (401) 824-4818, megan.tucker@heart.org
Daniel Fitzgerald, American Lung Association, (401) 533-5176, daniel.fitzgerald@Lung.org
Ryan Strik, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, (401) 259-1052, ryan.strik@cancer.org

ⁱ Max W, Sung HY, Shi Y (2012). Deaths from Secondhand Smoke Exposure in the United States: Economic Implications. *American Journal of Public Health*;102(11):2173-80.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2014). *The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress: A report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Diseases Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health. Printed with corrections, January 2014.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Cancer Institute (NCI). (1999). *Health Effects of Exposure to Environmental Tobacco Smoke: The Report of the California Environmental Protection Agency*. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph 10. Bethesda, MD: NCI.

^{iv} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (2006). *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coordinating Center for Health Promotion, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health.

^v HHS (2006).

^{vi} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (2010). *How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease: The Biology and Behavioral Basis for Smoking-Attributable Disease*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coordinating Center for Health Promotion, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health.

^{vii} <https://no-smoke.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/WRBGMap.pdf>