



April 10, 2025

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 5464

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee:

Our organizations appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 5464 by Representative Tanzi. This vital legislation would make Rhode Island’s casinos smokefree 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. The rest of Rhode Island’s hospitality industry has been smoke-free for **20 years**. During the pandemic, the gaming floors were smoke-free and patrons who wished to smoke had to do so outside. That temporary smokefree policy has ended 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 20,000 deaths, including over 4,100

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 in children.^{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}

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

It is unfair to prioritize the casino industry over the health concerns of hard-working employees who have been ignored for too long. 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 5464. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics – RI
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Heart Association
American Lung Association
American Nonsmokers' Rights
ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers)
Asthma and Allergy Foundation – New England
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
Protect our Healthcare Rhode Island
Rhode Island Nurses Association
Rhode Island Pharmacists Association
Rhode Island Public Health Institute
Rhode Island Society of Health-System Pharmacists

For additional information please contact:

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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. *Eliminating Tobacco-Related Disease and Death: Addressing Disparities—A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2024, p. 501..

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>

Smoke-free CASINOS

RHODE ISLAND

Stop gambling with the health of RI employees and patrons

20 states, including New York and Massachusetts, already prohibit smoking in state-regulated casinos.

Americans' For Nonsmokers Rights Foundation

Smoke-Free Casinos Perform Better

Post-pandemic trends show non-smoking properties earn more revenue than their counterparts that continue to allow smoking.

C3 Gaming Research Brief (2022) Evaluation of Post-Pandemic Non-Smoking Trends in U.S. Casinos;

Smoking attributed diseases cost RI \$639.6 million in healthcare costs annually.

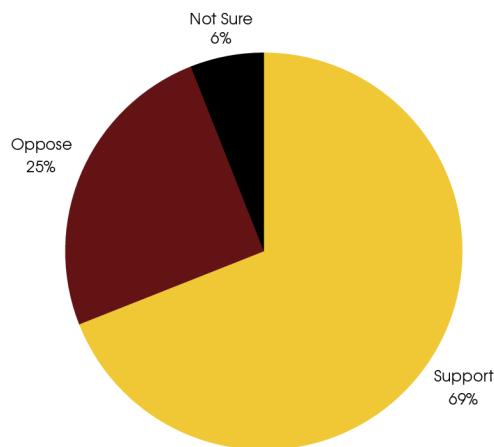
American Lung Association's 2025 State of Tobacco Control Report

There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke.

- A 2023 air quality report on fine particulate matter levels (PM2.5, an indicator for secondhand smoke) in non smoke-free casinos was 5.4x higher than in smoke-free casinos.
- Eliminating environmental (indoors or outdoors) secondhand smoke exposure is the only proven way of avoiding health impact.
- HVAC systems reduce odor and discomfort but **cannot** eliminate secondhand exposure.
- HVAC systems instead distribute toxic secondhand smoke.

What happens in Vegas, stays in your lungs: an assessment of fine particulate matter in casinos that prohibit and allow smoking in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA. Tobacco Control. February 23, 2023;

69% of Rhode Island Voters Support smoke-free Casinos



RI AFL CIO Rhode Island Voter Survey (February 2025)
Conducted by Fleming & Associates

TOBACCO
FREE RHODE
ISLAND

 TFRI@Lung.org

 tobaccofree-ri.org

Smoke-free CASINOS



What do Rhode Island employees have to say?

"I am a breast cancer survivor. Every day, I am exposed to secondhand smoke that lessens my chances of remaining in remission."

Lincoln Resident
Employee, Bally's Tiverton Casino

"I'm scared I will pass away from lung cancer like my father. Please help me live and work in a safe environment."

West Warwick Resident
Employee, Bally's Lincoln Casino

"Rhode Islanders prefer to gamble in non smoking casinos, they left when smoking returned indoors and now spend their money in CT and MA."

Providence Resident
Employee, Bally's Lincoln Casino

"Secondhand smoke leads to heart and lung disease, cancer, and other illnesses. Employees should not have to choose another job or their health."

Johnston Resident
Employee, Bally's Tiverton Casino

"I am extremely tired of working in these conditions. I want RI Casinos to be smoke-free so I don't smell like smoke every time I leave, I want breathable air at work."

North Providence Resident
Employee, Bally's Lincoln Casino

"I spend 40-50 hours a week surrounded by secondhand smoke. I deserve to work in a clean and healthy place. It is not nice to work in ash dumping zone."

Providence Resident
Employee, Bally's Tiverton Lincoln

What do patrons have to say?

"Literally every other workplace has banned smoking for good reason – secondhand smoke is proven to be harmful. People should not have their health compromised at work." – West Warwick Resident

"The air and every surface is dirty, it's about time you start to care about patrons and employees". – Pawtucket Resident

"I live 20 minutes away from Tiverton Casino, I drive to Plainville because there is no smoking allowed there. Smart move on their part!" – Out of State Patron

The rest of Rhode Island's hospitality industry has been smoke-free for 20 years. Casino employees have been ignored for too long.

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