



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE: May 2, 2007

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Health advocates praise movement toward smoke free workplaces *Statewide smoke free workplaces to become law in Illinois*

Health care advocacy groups and health care professionals around the state Wednesday praised Gov. Jim Doyle for again taking a stand to ensure all workers in Wisconsin – including those who work in taverns – will have the right to breathe clean indoor air. They also urged lawmakers from both parties to pass the statewide Wisconsin Breathe Free Act.

Meanwhile, the Illinois Legislature Monday sent to Gov. Rod Blagojevich a similar statewide smoke free workplace bill that he promised to sign into law, making Illinois the 19th state to protect workers from secondhand smoke.

“Wisconsin should be on the right side of history,” noted Maureen Busalacchi, executive director of Smoke Free Wisconsin, a coalition of health care organizations and health care advocacy groups. “Gov. Doyle receives our highest praise for yesterday announcing that all workplaces, including taverns, should be smoke free.

“We strongly encourage lawmakers to act quickly and pass the Breathe Free Wisconsin Act.”

Nearly two-thirds of voters support smoke-free workplaces, Busalacchi noted. And virtually the entire entertainment and hospitality industry announced last month that it too supports smoke-free workplaces, including all hotels, tourism venues, local convention/visitors bureaus and the state’s 16,000 restaurants, three-fourths of which also operate bars.

“The measure is strong health care policy,” said Busalacchi, noting that U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona last year concluded decisively that secondhand smoke is a proven cause of lung cancer, heart disease and serious respiratory illness.

“Secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance, but a serious health hazard that causes premature death and disease in children and nonsmoking adults,” Carmona said last year, noting that secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals, including at least 69 carcinogens.

If passed, Wisconsin would also join a number of countries including England, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, France and Scotland that have passed national laws to help ensure workers and customers breathe clean indoor air.

“Gov. Doyle and the co-sponsors from both parties sponsoring the Breathe Free Wisconsin Act are on the right side of history, good health care policy, and popular demand,” Busalacchi said. “We’re urging lawmakers from both parties to be on that side as well.”