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## **75 PERCENT OF VIRGINIA VOTERS SUPPORT SMOKE-FREE WORKPLACES**

*– Voters affirm the right to breathe clean air  
inside all workplaces, including bars and restaurants –*

**RICHMOND (January 30, 2008)** – A poll released today finds that voters from across Virginia overwhelmingly support legislation making all workplaces smoke-free.

By a three-to-one margin (75 percent to 24 percent), Virginia voters favor a statewide law prohibiting smoking inside all public buildings and workplaces, including offices, restaurants and bars. This support comes from a broad-based coalition of voters, including large majorities of men and women, young and old, and voters in all areas of the state. Support for a smoke-free Virginia also cuts across party lines, including support from 83 percent of Democrats and 71 percent of Republicans.

"Clearly, there is very strong support for a smoke-free law among Virginia voters," said Keenan Caldwell, state director of government relations for the American Cancer Society. "A strong majority of voters believe all workers and the public should be protected from secondhand smoke and that restaurants and bars would be healthier and more enjoyable if they were smoke-free."

The survey of 500 Virginia voters was released today by Virginians for a Healthy Future, the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association of Virginia, and the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. Upon releasing the results, the health groups called on the General Assembly to pass legislation that would make Virginia's public places and workplaces smoke-free.

"Voters recognize that exposure to secondhand smoke is a serious health hazard, and this poll demonstrates that they want a strong law protecting their right and the right of all workers to breathe clean air," said Cathleen Smith Grzesiek, director of government relations for the American Heart Association and chair of Virginians for a Healthy Future. "It's time for Virginia's legislators to step up to the plate and join the growing momentum across the nation to pass smoke-free laws that protect everyone from the serious health hazards of secondhand smoke."

In addition to the strong support for smoke-free workplace legislation, other findings of the survey include:

- Voters said they would be more likely to visit restaurants and bars if the smoke-free law is enacted. While 32 percent said they would go out to bars and restaurants more often if all bars and restaurants in the state were smoke-free, just 6 percent said they would go out less. Sixty-one percent said they would not change how often they go out to bars and restaurants.
- Voters recognize that exposure to secondhand smoke is harmful. More than eight out of 10 Virginia voters (85 percent) believe that exposure to secondhand smoke is harmful, with 64 percent of voters believing that it is a serious health hazard.
- Voters feel all workers should be protected from secondhand smoke. Eighty-eight (88) percent of voters agree that all workers in the state should be protected from exposure to secondhand smoke in the workplace.
- Voters place priority on the right of customers and workers to breathe clean air in restaurants and bars. Eighty-two percent of voters (including a 58 percent majority of smokers) believe that the right of customers and employees to breathe clean air in restaurants and bars is more important than the right of smokers to smoke in these places.

Virginia voters also feel that the state's hospitality establishments would be healthier and more enjoyable if they were smoke-free. Nearly nine out of 10 voters (87 percent) believe that these places would be healthier, and 86 percent want to be able to enjoy restaurants and bars in the state without smelling like smoke at the end of the evening.

"These findings help explain why virtually every objective economic study ever conducted on the subject shows that smoke-free laws have no negative impact on the hospitality industry," said David DeBiasi, director of advocacy and public education for the American Lung Association of Virginia.

Twenty-two states plus Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico have now passed smoke-free laws that include restaurants and bars. The states are Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland (Feb. 1, 2008), Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana (extends to bars Sept. 1, 2009), New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon (Jan. 1, 2009), Rhode Island, Utah (extends to bars Jan. 7, 2009), Vermont and Washington.

The need for protection from secondhand smoke in all workplaces and public places has never been clearer. In issuing a groundbreaking report on secondhand smoke in June 2006, U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona stated, "The debate is over. The science is clear: Secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance, but a serious health hazard that causes premature death and disease in children and nonsmoking adults." Secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals, including at least 69 carcinogens. The evidence is also clear that smoke-free laws protect health without harming business. As the U.S. Surgeon General concluded, "Evidence from peer-reviewed studies shows that smoke-free policies and regulations do not have an adverse impact on the hospitality industry."

*The Mellman Group conducted a survey of 500 registered voters in Virginia, who were interviewed by telephone January 22-24, 2008. The margin of error for this survey is +/-4.4 percent at the 95 percent level of confidence. The margin of error is higher for subgroups.*

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Visit <http://smokefreevanow.org/poll08> for complete poll results.