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Smoke-free Legislation Introduced in House and Senate

Legislation to prohibit smoking in all of Virginia's public indoor workplaces, including restaurants and bars, was introduced Wednesday in both houses of the General Assembly, Virginians for a Healthy Future announced.

The Virginia Smoke Free Air Act was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Mary Margaret Whipple (S.B. 298) and in the House of Delegates by Del. Phillip Hamilton (H.B. 500). Identical bills were also filed in the House by Del. Algie Howell (H.B. 572) and Del. Harvey Morgan. (H.B. 821). The legislation would effectively eliminate secondhand smoke in all Virginia workplaces and public places, protecting non-smokers and restaurant workers, as well as vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, pregnant women and those living with lung, diabetes or heart disease.

"The need for protection from secondhand smoke in all workplaces and public places has never been clearer," said Sen. Whipple. "Everyone has the right to breathe clean, smoke-free air. My colleagues in the General Assembly need to join the 85%* of Virginians who believe that all workers should be protected from exposure to secondhand smoke in the workplace."

Secondhand smoke is estimated to cause 1,000 to 1,700 deaths per year in Virginia from such causes as SIDS, lung cancer, respiratory disease and heart disease. In a 2006 report, the U.S. Surgeon General found that there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke and that the only way to protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke is to require smoke-free workplaces and public places. Other

approaches, such as air ventilation systems and smoking and non-smoking sections, do not eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke.

"You can't argue with the science," said Delegate Hamilton. "There is no longer any scientific doubt that secondhand smoke poses a serious threat to human health. In the past, we could say, 'We simply didn't know any better,' but now the evidence is overwhelming."

The fact is also clear that businesses have nothing to fear from a smoke-free law. There is overwhelming evidence from smoke-free states and cities around the country that smoke-free laws protect health without harming business. As the U.S. Surgeon General concluded in his June 2006 report, "Evidence from peer-reviewed studies shows that smoke-free policies and regulations do not have an adverse impact on the hospitality industry."

"We commend Del. Hamilton and Sen. Whipple for tackling this important public health issue," commented Cathleen Smith Grzesiek, director of public policy for the American Heart Association and chair of Virginians for a Healthy Future. "The partners and supporters of the Virginians for a Healthy Future coalition including the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association of Virginia, the Medical Society of Virginia, the Virginia Academy of Family Physicians, the Virginia Academy of Pediatrics, the March of Dimes, and all of the members of the Coalition enthusiastically support this legislation. We urge swift passage of both H.B. 500 and S.B. 298 on behalf of all Virginians who support making Virginia smoke free."

If passed, this legislation will make Virginia the 21st smoke-free state.

**Mason-Dixon poll, November 2006*

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Virginians for a Healthy Future is a coalition of community organizations and individuals working to prevent and reduce death and disease caused by tobacco use. Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in Virginia. Learn more about the health effects of secondhand smoke and the benefits of cleaning up our air by visiting our website at: www.smokefreevanow.org