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59% of Kentucky Voters Support Comprehensive Statewide Smoke-Free Law

Poll shows strong support as Smoke-Free Kentucky Campaign launches today

FRANKFORT, KY (January 6, 2011) – Kentucky health advocates today released a new poll showing 59% of Kentucky voters support passing a law to make all restaurants, bars and other workplaces smoke-free. The release is part of the launch of Smoke-Free Kentucky’s campaign to ensure that all Kentuckians have the right to breathe clean, smoke-free air in public places and at work.

By a 59 percent to 39 percent margin, the poll found that voters support a law in Kentucky that would prohibit smoking in most public places, including workplaces, public buildings, offices, restaurants and bars. This includes 44 percent who **strongly** favor the law. Support cuts across party lines, including 60 percent of Republicans, 55 percent of Independents and 59 percent of Democrats.

The survey also found among Kentucky voters:

- 76 percent believe that exposure to secondhand smoke is harmful; with 48 percent of voters believing that it is a *serious* health hazard.
- 67 percent of voters (including 48 percent of smokers) believe the right of customers and employees to breathe clean air in restaurants and bars is more important than the right of smokers to smoke or owners to allow smoking in these places.
- 55 percent of Kentucky voters prefer a candidate for state office who supports a smoke-free law over one who opposes it. This support comes from a majority of Democrats, Republicans and independents.

Due to the overwhelming and irrefutable evidence that secondhand smoke harms human health, coupled with strong public support, Rep. Susan Westrom (D-Lexington) today announced her intent to file a bill calling for a comprehensive statewide smoke-free law in Kentucky.

“It’s not just an annoyance, it’s a known cause of premature death and disease in non-smokers,” said Westrom. “No one should have to choose between their health and a paycheck. Smoke-free policies are an easy way to solve a serious public health problem, they are good for business, and they are very popular with Kentucky voters.”

Currently, people in 27 Kentucky communities have at least some level of protection in the workplace and public places. However, Smoke-Free Kentucky believes *everyone* has the right to breathe clean air at work and deserves to be free from this unnecessary health risk.

“We encourage Kentucky’s local elected officials to continue to pass laws making workplaces in their communities 100% smoke-free,” said Amy Barkley of the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. “While

we continue that local progress, we're starting to educate state legislators as well, so that when the time is right, they will pass a comprehensive smoke-free law that covers all workplaces, including restaurants and bars, across the state of Kentucky." Across the United States, 23 states and 447 municipalities have enacted strong smoke-free laws that apply to all workplaces, restaurants and bars.

These laws are an appropriate response to the overwhelming scientific evidence that secondhand smoke is a serious health hazard that causes heart disease, lung cancer, and other serious illnesses. As smoke-free laws have spread, the evidence has also grown that these laws protect health without harming business in bars, restaurants and other hospitality venues.

"Secondhand smoke causes death and disease. There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Even brief exposure puts a person at risk for a heart attack or an asthma attack. Every exposure to the cancer-causing chemicals in tobacco smoke can damage DNA in a way that leads to cancer." said Dr. Goetz Kloecker, Director of the Thoracic Oncology Clinic at the University of Louisville Brown Cancer Center.

The need for protecting Kentuckians from secondhand smoke in all workplaces and public places has never been greater. The evidence is also clear that smoke-free laws protect health without harming business. As the U.S. Surgeon General concluded in a 2006 report, "Evidence from peer-reviewed studies shows that smoke-free policies and regulations do not have an adverse impact on the hospitality industry." Several of these peer-reviewed studies done in Kentucky show the same thing: smoke-free laws do not hurt business.

The survey of 500 likely Kentucky voters was released by the American Heart Association, American Lung Association, American Cancer Society, and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, which are all founding members of the Smoke-Free Kentucky coalition. Polling firm Public Opinion Strategies conducted the survey, which has a sample of 500 registered likely Kentucky voters and was conducted December 12th to December 14th, 2010. The poll has a margin of error of +/- 4.38 percentage points.

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Smoke Free Kentucky is a coalition of public health organizations, community-based groups, physicians, businesses, schools, the faith community, and Kentucky residents.