

Testimony in Opposition of HB 1152

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Chairman Senator Klein, and members of the Industry, Business, and Labor Committee. My name is Jessica Arndt. I currently serve as the President of the Bismarck Tobacco Free Coalition. I am also a respiratory therapist and educator. I have worked in respiratory care for nearly 13 years. I am here to provide testimony in opposition of HB 1152.

The Bismarck Tobacco Free Coalition has always led the way in advocating for smoke-free air protection for all workers. In 2005, when the City of Bismarck passed its first smoke-free ordinance, it only applied to restaurants and all indoor workplaces except bars. Immediately after the adoption of this ordinance, we received phone calls from bartenders, wait staff, gaming employees and musicians wanting to know why they were excluded? Are their lives less important? Didn't they deserve to have the same, safe, smoke-free working environment? Our coalition again educated others about the need to protect all workers, and eventually the citizens of the City of Bismarck voted in a majority to support a smoke-free ordinance for all workplaces, including bars and private clubs. HB 1152 would create an exemption to our ND Smoke Free Law that caters to only 4% of North Dakota's population, as just 4% of the population uses cigars. Plus, this exemption would jeopardize the lives of employees as they will again be exposed to the detrimental effects of secondhand tobacco smoke from cigars.

On another note, I previously mentioned that I am an educator, I get to help students become respiratory therapists. One of the courses I teach is a human disease course through which students learn about a many pulmonary disease processes. I find myself repeating, over and over again, that exposure to tobacco smoke is a risk factor. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, exposure to tobacco smoke is a known risk factor for at least four of the top ten causes of death in the United States and the State of North Dakota – heart disease, cancer, chronic lower respiratory disease, and stroke. As you can see, HB 1152 would not offer North Dakotans any health-related benefits, rather it would increase their risk of developing these diseases. Furthermore, if you think about the financial burden caused by the aforementioned disease processes, the medical costs to our citizens, and the lost days of work and productivity for our community, you will see that it is prudent to uphold our comprehensive smoke free indoor air law.

While I applaud the entrepreneurial spirit of HB 1152, putting business and financial profit above the health of the citizens of North Dakota needs to be examined carefully. The Bismarck Tobacco Free Coalition urges you to vote "NO" on HB 1152 because it will unravel North Dakota's Comprehensive Indoor Smoke Free Air Law, taking a step backwards and putting our citizens at risk of secondhand tobacco smoke once again. To bend this law, even just a little, even for just one cigar bar, would be a disservice to the people you represent, the people who voted in favor of this law and who still want to uphold this law.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

References

1. North Dakota Tobacco Surveillance Data:
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2. CDC. Health Effects of Second Hand Smoke:
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4. CDC. Stats of the State of North Dakota:
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/states/northdakota/northdakota.htm>
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