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House Judiciary Committee Backs the Right to Breathe Safe, Indoor Air
Smoke-free advocates on hand to witness vote during lobby day

Raleigh, N.C. – Mar. 24, 2009 – Employees and patrons of North Carolina businesses and restaurants can breathe easier knowing that N.C. House of Representatives Judiciary 1 Committee today approved legislation protecting workers from the dangers of secondhand smoke. The legislation, House Bill 2 (HB 2), would make virtually all indoor worksites and public places, including restaurants and bars, smoke-free.

"It is imperative that our state's lawmakers recognize everyone's right to breathe smoke-free, indoor air," said Betsy Vetter, Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association and Chair for the North Carolina Alliance for Health. "Now is the time to pass this important piece of legislation in North Carolina, and today's vote shows that our representatives are stepping up to the plate." HB 2 is sponsored by Rep. Hugh Holliman (D-Davidson), and will next be taken up by the full House for a floor vote.

Health advocates were on hand to see the vote as they rallied for Smoke-Free Lobby Day today at the General Assembly. In preparation for meetings with legislators, participants received advocacy training before attending the House committee hearing. "It is unusual that advocates get to see historic votes like the one today," said Ashley Bell, Director of Government Relations for the American Cancer Society. "Supporters are excited to be a part of this event, and they are seeing the results of their dedication and passion around smoke-free workplaces."

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, secondhand smoke causes lung cancer, heart disease, serious respiratory illnesses such as bronchitis and asthma, low birth weight and sudden infant death syndrome.

Health care costs are rising, and a new report released by the state Division of Public Health confirms that secondhand smoke is responsible for \$289 million in state health care costs, resulting from lung cancer and other diseases.

"This legislation will not only save lives and reduce unnecessary deaths, but it can help cut down on health care costs associated with secondhand smoke," said Pam Seamans, Policy Director for the North Carolina Alliance for Health. "Given our state's budget predicament, every bit helps. But, dollars saved is only a bonus. Saving lives is the reason this bill is so important."

"We are hopeful the full House will act quickly to pass HB 2," said Seamans. "Their leadership can save lives, reduce illness and control unnecessary costs."

The North Carolina Alliance for Health is an independent, statewide coalition of public, private, professional and nonprofit organizations advocating for obesity and tobacco use prevention policies before North Carolina's legislative and executive branches. Alliance members and partners include the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society, the Cancer Action Network, NC Pediatric Society, NC Prevention Partners, Local Health Directors Association, State Employees Association of NC, March of Dimes, American Diabetes Association, the NC Health Access Coalition, the Covenant with NC's Children, AARP, the Council of Churches, the Christian Action League and many others.

For further information about the North Carolina Alliance for Health and its policy priorities, contact Pam Seamans at (919) 949-5992 or pamseamans@nc.rr.com. You may also visit their Web site at www.ncallianceforhealth.org. Learn more about the health effects of secondhand smoke by visiting www.smokefreenc.org.

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