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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Amended Smoke-Free Legislation Passes in NC House**

*Weakened legislation ignores workers' safety, adds confusing loopholes*

Raleigh, N.C. – Apr. 2, 2009 – Today, the N.C. House of Representatives approved smoke-free indoor legislation for workplaces, restaurants and bars. During the debate, amendments were adopted that carve out exemptions for too many workplaces, and will leave many workers breathing deadly, smoky air. The North Carolina Alliance for Health is urging the Senate to strengthen the bill and respect the intention of the bill – to protect the right of every worker to breathe safe, smoke-free indoor air.

Smoke-free laws are most easily implemented and enforced when the general public understands what is covered and what is not. The bill includes a minors-only exemption which has proven to be problematic in other states as any business can decide when to allow only adults.

"As amended, this legislation sends a message that the health of certain workers really isn't that important," said Betsy Vetter, Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association and Chair for the North Carolina Alliance for Health.

"This legislation isn't just about protecting minors - its about protecting the health of all workers," said Vetter. "The same rights that apply to legislators – to breathe smoke-free indoor air – is not afforded to workers in sites that are exempted."

"We're concerned that a few legislators' desire to protect the tobacco industry in North Carolina seemed to override their larger duty to protect all workers," said Ashley Bell, Director of Government Relations for the American Cancer Society. "The bill as approved by the House protects only certain classes of workers. That is not good enough for North Carolina."

House Bill 2 (HB2), sponsored by Rep. Hugh Holliman (D-Davidson), was voted down by a narrow margin in the House in 2005 and 2007. North Carolina has the opportunity to join 22 other states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico in passing smoke-free workplace legislation.

"Numerous other states and cities around the country have already recognized their constituents' right to breathe smoke-free indoor air," said Bell. "Our state's lawmakers should be demonstrating their leadership and vision by doing the same. Science and even our own legislators' experiences show that secondhand smoke is responsible for life-changing illnesses and spiraling health care costs – even for non-smokers."

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.

"We deeply appreciate the efforts of our legislators and dedicated supporters who committed themselves to this important bill," said Pam Seamans, Policy Director for the North Carolina Alliance for Health. "Passing smoke-free legislation as it was intended would have been an important step toward reducing our state's health care costs, but more importantly, protecting all North Carolinians from the anguish of severe illness and death caused by secondhand smoke."

"We look forward to working with members of the Senate to restore this bill to its original strength," said Deborah Bryan, NC State Executive for the American Lung Association.

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 American Cancer Society 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](mailto:pamseamans@nc.rr.com). You may also visit their Web site at [www.ncallianceforhealth.org](http://www.ncallianceforhealth.org). Learn more about the health effects of secondhand smoke by visiting [www.smokefreenc.org](http://www.smokefreenc.org).

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