



## House Committee on Finance Testimony in Support of House Bill 5464

TO: Rep. Marvin L. Abney, Chair,  
Rep. Scott A. Slater, First Vice Chair,  
Rep. Alex Marszalkowski, Second Vice Chair, & Members of the House  
Committee on Finance

FROM: Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights

DATE: April 10, 2025

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of House Bill 5464

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of H-5464, legislation that would close the casino loophole in Rhode Island's smokefree workplace law. My name is Cynthia Hallett, and I serve as the President and CEO of Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights (ANR), a national membership-based advocacy organization dedicated to protecting everyone's right to breathe smokefree air. We have been working on this issue since the mid-1970s, beginning with efforts to eliminate secondhand smoke exposure in workplaces and public places, then expanding to restaurants, bars, airplanes — and now, casinos.

We strongly support H-5464 and commend the House Committee on Finance for considering this critical legislation that will protect casino workers and patrons in Rhode Island from the dangers of secondhand smoke. As public health advocates, we are deeply concerned about the ongoing exposure of casino workers to toxic, cancer causing chemicals, especially as virtually every other worker in the state is protected from smoke and e-cigarette aerosol.

The evidence is clear: secondhand smoke poses serious health risks. Tobacco smoke contains more than 70 [known](#) carcinogens, and studies have consistently shown that exposure increases the risk of heart disease, lung cancer, and respiratory illnesses. According to recent research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), prohibiting smoking throughout the entirety of a casino is the [only](#) effective way to protect workers from these harms. Simply put, there is no safe level of secondhand smoke exposure.

After nearly 20 years of the casino smoking exemption remaining in place, casino workers have been left vulnerable to cancer-causing agents and a wide range of other diseases. Secondhand smoke is a leading contributor to asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and heart disease — the number one cause of death in the United States. Protecting casino workers from exposure is not just a workplace safety issue — it is a matter of life and death.

We cannot afford to wait any longer while workers continue to suffer from preventable health consequences. Contrary to industry claims, ventilation systems are not the solution. The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) — the standard-setters for indoor air quality — [findings](#) are definitive: "There is no currently available or reasonably anticipated ventilation or air-cleaning system that can adequately control or

significantly reduce the health risks of [environmental tobacco smoke] to an acceptable level.” As ASHRAE makes clear, ventilation can reduce odor and discomfort, but it cannot eliminate exposure to the harmful toxins in secondhand smoke.

Beyond the public health imperative, closing this loophole also makes good business sense. A smokefree environment will attract a larger and more diverse customer base. Today, 9 out of 10 Americans are nonsmokers, including the vast majority of both casino patrons and employees. Studies show that many patrons actively prefer and expect smokefree establishments and may choose to avoid those that allow indoor smoking. With only 11% of the U.S. population currently smoking, casinos that continue to allow indoor smoking are catering to a shrinking audience — at the expense of worker health. By creating healthier and more welcoming spaces, casinos can enhance the customer experience, draw more foot traffic, and ultimately contribute positively to the state’s economy.

We have seen this in practice. There are now 20 states that require all commercial gaming to be 100% smokefree, and their casinos are operating successfully. Most of Rhode Island’s neighbors — including Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York — have smokefree casinos. Several in Pennsylvania have also adopted smokefree policies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, casinos in Rhode Island demonstrated that they could operate successfully without indoor smoking. Now is the time to make that change permanent.

Rhode Island was once a national leader in adopting a strong smokefree law, but like several other states at the time, it left a dangerous loophole for casinos. It is time to complete that work and extend equal protection to casino workers. This bill is a common-sense, evidence-based step that will immediately and tangibly improve lives.

Please act swiftly to pass H-5464. Protect the health of casino workers. Align the law with what we know works and what the [public wants](#). And join the growing list of states doing right by their workers and communities.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cynthia Hallett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Cynthia Hallett, MPH  
President and CEO  
Americans for Nonsmokers’ Rights