



August 2, 2021



The Honorable Hardie Davis, Jr., Mayor  
The Honorable Sean Frantom, Commission Member  
The Honorable Jordan Johnson, Commission Member  
The Honorable John Clarke, Commission Member  
The Honorable Sammie Sias, Commission Member  
The Honorable Ben Hasan, Commission Member  
The Honorable Dennis Williams, Commission Member

The Honorable Catherine Smith Mcknight, Commission Member  
The Honorable Brandon Garrett, Commission Member  
The Honorable Francine Scott, Commission Member  
The Honorable Bobby Williams, Commission Member

Dear Mayor Davis and Commission Members,

The undersigned public health organizations, facilities and healthcare providers urge you to protect the integrity of the overwhelmingly popular and effective Augusta-Richmond smokefree law by opposing the proposed amendment to create a loophole for cigar lounges. We support the Augusta-Richmond Smokefree Ordinance as it stands. This is the first attempt to roll back the ordinance's protections from secondhand smoke for workers and those in public places. Passage of this amendment would be a huge setback for our city.

In 2018, The Augusta-Richmond Commission wisely opted to protect employees, residents, and visitors from exposure to secondhand smoke by making workplaces and public places smoke-free, leading the state with a strong law. The proposed amendment to exempt cigar lounges from Augusta's smokefree ordinance would create a loophole that will severely weaken this important public health law putting population health protections and healthcare cost savings in jeopardy.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that exposure to secondhand smoke kills over 41,000 Americans per year, and it is a known cause of lung cancer, heart disease and stroke. In addition, secondhand smoke causes and impacts a wide range of damaging health effects including respiratory infections and diseases such as asthma. Cigar smoke has higher levels of cancer-causing substances and toxins and more tar than cigarettes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) make it clear that there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Even short-term exposure potentially increases the risk of heart attacks.

Everyone deserves the right to breathe smokefree air. Creating loopholes that allow indoor smoking exposes people to secondhand smoke as ventilation systems do not protect against the health risks associated with secondhand smoke exposure. The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) specifically does "not prescribe ventilation rates or claim to provide acceptable indoor air quality in smoking areas" because "the only means to avoid health effects and eliminate indoor environmental tobacco smoke exposure is to ban all smoking activity inside and near buildings."

Augusta-Richmond's smoke-free law is effective and popular. Exemptions will put employees and patrons at risk. We strongly urge council members to reject the proposed amendment to allow cigar bars or cigar lounges.

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Inc.  
American Heart Association  
American Lung Association  
Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights

Augusta University  
Breathesay Augusta  
Medical Association of Georgia  
United Advanced Practice Registered Nurses - Augusta