



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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Legislation clears the air for children riding in cars

SB 444A protects children from the negative health effects of secondhand smoke

SALEM— Today, the Oregon Senate took a step to protect children’s health by clearing the air in cars and trucks. Senate Bill 444A, which passed on a bipartisan 19-10 vote, makes smoking in a motor vehicle with a driver or passenger under 18 a traffic violation.

“We have a responsibility to keep Oregon’s children safe from exposure to smoke, which causes health problems like severe asthma and respiratory infections,” said Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward (D-Portland), chief sponsor of the bill and a family physician. “SB 444A is an important step to protecting children from the negative, sometimes lifelong impacts of secondhand smoke.”

According to the American Lung Association, infants and young children are especially vulnerable to secondhand smoke while their lungs are still developing. When a smoker lights up in the enclosed space of a car or truck, secondhand smoke can reach concentrations up to 27 times more potent than concentrations when smoking in a home.

“Children have very little control over the small space inside of a car, and it’s a huge health problem when that space fills up with smoke,” said Senator Rod Monroe (D-Portland), who authored Oregon’s original Clean Indoor Air Act in 1981. “It is up to us to protect our children’s health, and with SB 444A we can prevent long-lasting health effects from unsafe secondhand smoke.”

Current Oregon law prohibits smoking in cars that transport foster children, as do the laws of 16 other states. Four states have enacted laws to protect minors generally from secondhand smoke in motor vehicles, as have Puerto Rico and Guam. SB 444A would make smoking in cars with minors a Class D traffic violation enforceable only as a secondary offense, meaning that law enforcement officers would need to initially stop a vehicle for a separate traffic offense. Repeat offenses would be a Class C traffic violation.

“Senate Bill 444 is about preventing significant health problems and creating healthy environments for children,” said Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland). “We take children’s health very seriously, and this legislation can prevent a lifetime of health problems from the consequences of secondhand smoke. Not only is it the right choice for kids, but it will produce savings in health care over the long run.”

Senate Bill 444 will now go to the Oregon House of Representatives for consideration.

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