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Testimony for Nevada State Legislature

Assembly Judiciary Committee

March 18th, 2003

In support of **AB96**.

By Dr Mary Guinan, Nevada Public Health Association

Chairman Anderson and Members of the Committee:

For the record I am Dr Mary Guinan, executive director of the Nevada Public Health Foundation in support of AB 96

I am speaking today on the health risks of environmental tobacco smoke especially for our children. Ten years ago the EPA designated Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) or secondhand smoke as a class A carcinogen. This means that it is known to cause cancer in people and is estimated to cause 3000 lung cancer deaths in non-smokers annually in the U.S. ETS contains 4000 substances, 43 of which are known to cause cancer. There is no known safe level of exposure. The effects are cumulative over a lifetime. But this information only tells a small part of the health risks of ETS. Children exposed to ETS are at increased risk for respiratory infections, ear infections and asthma. ETS is known to be one of the most potent triggers of asthma attacks. Children with asthma are especially sensitive to ETS and exposure can result in increased severity of the asthma attacks. Nevada has one of the highest rates of childhood asthma in the country. Yet we are not providing tobacco free space for our children. Not in schools, not in grocery stores, not in convenience stores and not in most restaurants. If there is a smoking section in a store or school, the smoke is sucked into the air circulating system and re-circulated throughout the building. There are not separate ventilation systems.

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ASSEMBLY/JUDICIARY
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SUBMITTED BY: MARY GUINAN

All those chemicals in tobacco smoke are re-circulated throughout the day so it is impossible to know what the true level of exposure is at any given time. A group of teens in Washoe County who are working on making a tobacco prevention commercial have adopted the following statement to use: "***Having a smoking section in a store is like having a peeing section in a swimming pool***". I believe this analogy is accurate. I have heard the opposition testify that people "vote with their feet". Oh that we had the choice!!!. Parents in Nevada do not have the choice of sending their children to smoke free schools. Many schools have smoking areas for teachers. And as for grocery stores the Nevada Public Health Foundation requested from the Nevada Retail Grocers Association a list of all groceries stores in Nevada that did not have a smoking section. They could not provide us with a single name. They maintained that all of the groceries stores were smoke free except for the smoking sections. If the stores have a smoking section they are by definition not smoke free. So we cannot vote with our feet we do not have a choice in Nevada. We do have a growing list of restaurants where smoking is prohibited and therefore are truly smoke-free. Unfortunately this is still a small percentage of Nevada restaurants.

Some have argued that the health risk of ETS is exaggerated. Do not be misled. The scientific evidence has been corroborated over and over again: For children, ear infections respiratory infections and asthma for the short term. The long term risks are still not known for childhood exposure. The evidence for other health problems is mounting. Last week in the Journal of the American Medical Association (March 11, 2003) researchers reported that children exposed to ETS were more than twice as likely

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to show signs of tooth decay than those without exposure. Nevada children have one of the highest dental decay rates in the nation.

What is the evidence that ETS gets into the bodies of our children. The most convincing data come from The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention which reported that on a testing a random sample of the population of the U.S. for environmental toxins over 50% of children under 18 who did not smoke had evidence of tobacco breakdown products (cotinine) in their systems. Nevada has the smallest percentage of smoke free indoor space in the nation and it is likely that even a higher percentage of our children have been contaminated by environmental tobacco smoke. . The health risks of ETS for our children are clear. How to prevent them is also clear. The voters in all Washoe and Clark County districts have by a large margin supported banning smoking in places where children frequent. Please support AB 96 and give our children smoke free space. Thank you.

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