

No Secondhand Smoke Exposure is Safe

By: **Sarah Fuchs** , Jamestown, N.D

In regard to HB 1213 currently being debated, I would like to state that there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. New and old research continues to support this statement. Why then is it still debated?

The issue surrounding a comprehensive statewide smoking ban is not an issue of smoker vs. nonsmoker, but an issue of public safety. The Bismarck Tribune states in its Feb. 10 editorial: "Protecting people from those who smoke seems to make legislative sense. But it isn't the Legislature's job to protect people from themselves or pass along punishment."

I would agree. The bill doesn't protect smokers from themselves, nor does it punish those who choose to smoke. It would not eliminate the sale of tobacco or one's freedom to smoke in a private place. It simply protects the public from the dangers of secondhand smoke.

One of the arguments business owners who currently allow smoking have is it is their right to run their business any way they choose. However, they do not have the right to harm their workers or the public who choose to patronize their establishment.

Additionally under the current law, not every business has the right to choose to be smoke-free or not. If the Legislature passes HB 1213, all businesses will be treated equally under the law, and all people will be protected. One hundred percent smoke-free laws now cover more than 50 percent of the population in the United States and many entire countries around the world. The state has chosen in the past not to lead this fight, but maybe now the time has come to follow.