

PA Association of Nationally Chartered Organizations

Testimony House Health Committee Monday June 15, 2015

Good morning Chairman Baker, Chairman Fabrizio and members of the House Health Committee. My name is Tom Helsel and I am the secretary for the Pennsylvania Association of Nationally Chartered Organizations. PANCO is comprised of fraternal and veteran organizations in Pennsylvania that hold a national charter. Our membership consists of individual lodges, posts and aeries from the Elks, Moose, Eagles, American Legion and VFW. I also serve as the Government Relations Chairman of the Pennsylvania Elks State Association.

I am here to state our position in opposition to HB 682 which would remove the exclusion of private clubs from the Clean Indoor Air Act. Since its inception in 2008, our members have been provided the opportunity to either permit or ban smoking within their facilities. Many of our members have voted to permit smoking while many others have voted to prohibit it. In a few instances some have reversed their decision. The important key is that is has been left to our members to make that choice.

While in no way do we wish to diminish or ignore the hazards associated with smoking, our members clearly understand and acknowledge those hazards, we believe that it is a personal choice left to our members whether to allow smoking within our clubs. I can attest that since the CIAA was established many of our clubs have opted to go smoke free. As we move further down the road, more of our members are making that choice. But clearly, the choice and decision to permit smoking or go smoke free has been that of the membership of our clubs.

As secretary to PANCO and as the Government Relations Chairman for the Elks, I have discussed with many of my members the problems surrounding this issue. Many of us have instituted smoking policies within our facilities limiting smoking to certain areas and/or certain times. Our membership cherishes the right for individuals to choose whether to smoke or not. We recognize that many of our members enjoy the right to gather and socialize with others while enjoying in that privilege. We also recognize that not all our members engage in this behavior and many have implemented policies to accommodate that segment.

A core belief of our organizations is that we are private clubs; in essence we view our facilities as an extension of our homes. And as such, we believe that we should be able to continue in having the choice to engage or not engage in the use of legal tobacco products. Since our makeup includes veteran organizations and a large proportion of our entire membership consists of veterans allow me to paraphrase a line from a colleague, veterans and others should retain the

right to decide whether they share a smoke with their comrades while discussing their service to our country.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with this testimony.

Thomas W. Helsel, Jr.
Secretary
PA Association of Nationally Chartered Organizations