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Legislators discuss protecting Minnesota’s most vulnerable children by providing smoke-free foster care

Bill would keep children safe from the dangers of secondhand smoke

St. Paul, MN (March 17, 2014) – Today the Senate Health, Human Services and Housing Committee heard testimony in support of Senate File (SF) 2125, a bill that would make foster care homes smoke-free.

"Secondhand smoke is particularly dangerous for children, as their bodies are still developing," said bill author Senator Jeff Hayden (DFL-Minneapolis). "Many children in foster care have already been subjected to hardships in their lives, and 80 percent of them suffer at least one chronic medical condition. They should be protected from the dangers of secondhand smoke."

Research shows that secondhand smoke is known to cause Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, respiratory infections, asthma attacks and ear infections among children.

SF 2125 would add a smoke-free environment to existing requirements for potential foster parents that ensure a safe, healthy home for children before a placement is made. More than half of all U.S. states have smoke-free foster care laws, and eight Minnesota counties have passed similar ordinances. These policies are supported by the National Foster Parent Association as well as by a majority of Minnesotans – 93 percent.

"It's our duty to protect the health and safety of children in the foster care system," said Pat McKone, Director of Tobacco Control Programs and Policy for the American Lung Association of the Upper Midwest. "Adult nonsmokers are protected from secondhand smoke by the Freedom to Breathe Act, and there is no reason that Minnesota children shouldn't have the same protection."

The House companion to this bill will be heard in the Early Childhood and Youth Development Policy Committee on Wednesday, March 19.

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