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**Raised Bill #419: An Act Prohibiting Smoking in Regulated Areas in Casinos
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My name is Dr. Pat Checko. I am the Chairman of the MATCH Coalition; Mobilizing Against Tobacco for Connecticut's Health. I am here to support passage of Bill #419. Connecticut is celebrating the fifth year of its landmark legislation that prohibited smoking in public places. You, our legislature, enacted this bill in 2003 to protect both the public and the employees who work in these places. MATCH was in the vanguard of the fight against Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) then and continues to be dedicated to protecting people from the effects of secondhand smoke.

I won't go through the health data on tobacco and a myriad of diseases. We all know it. Nor will I recite the litany of secondhand smoke and the carcinogens and chemicals associated with it. We also know that too well. We all agree that the right thing to do is to prohibit smoking in public places – and you did. Connecticut's Clean Indoor Act was a victory for workers' rights and a healthier work environment, whether they work in a restaurant or bar, Wal-Mart or Macy's or the former smoke filled legislative caucus rooms.

As much as we have accomplished, some sacrifices were made to pass the Clean Air Act. In 2003, some exemptions were made to the law so it would pass. These included Connecticut's casinos, private clubs and small businesses. It's time to rethink the reasonableness of such exemptions and the safety of the workers involved.

In a special report on secondhand smoke in casinos, Berman and Post writing for the Tobacco Legal Consortium cited a 1998 study that found "that casino workers in so-called 'well-ventilated' casinos had metabolized nicotine levels that were 300 to 600% higher than those in other smoking workplaces during a work shift." Others will be reporting on the results of air quality studies conducted at Connecticut's casinos just last week. There is in fact NO SAFE LEVEL of ETS and even sophisticated ventilation systems are ineffective in protecting both patrons and employees. That is why MATCH opposed ventilation as a solution in 2003, and continues to do so.

Hundreds of employees work at the Connecticut casinos and hundreds of thousands of Connecticut and out-of-state patrons frequent them. From a public health perspective, this is not an issue of sovereign rights; it is an issue of human rights and workers' rights. Casino employees have the same right as you and I to work in a smoke-free workplace. I have appreciated being able to go to work, a restaurant or a sports bar, and not have to breathe in arsenic, formaldehyde, lead, benzene, DDT and other components of ETS. Casino employees face higher levels of exposure to ETS than almost any profession, and, as a result more frequently suffer from their devastating health effects. It's time that they were provided the same protection from secondhand smoke as employees in other businesses. Let's get rid of this needless exemption. In fact, let's get rid of all the exemptions.

Patricia J. Checko, Dr. P.H., Chairman
MATCH Coalition