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**Testimony in Support of Raised House Bill 884
An Act Prohibiting Smoking in Private Clubs
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My name is Dr. Pat Checko. I am Chairman of the statewide MATCH Coalition (Mobilizing Against Tobacco for Connecticut's Health). MATCH supports Raised Bill 884 that would remove the waiver that exempts public clubs from compliance with the smoke-free law for public places. When the Clean Indoor Air Act was passed in 2003, the private club lobby was strong enough to exact this exemption in order to pass the bill. So, while the Thursday night bowling club members have to have their beer without a cigarette, the country club member can enjoy their single malt scotch along with a fine cigar.

More importantly, this exemption also gives them a "Get Out of Jail" card for compliance with food services laws related to smoking. Many of these clubs serve food. Where else can you go to eat, drink and smoke?

The argument that they might make is that you have to be a member to get into the club. Not totally true. Many allow guests, or even rent out the facility for public events (even if through the intervention of a member). So are they as "private" as they claim?

It is eight years since the state of Connecticut banned smoking in workplaces, restaurants and other public places. No one has suffered a loss of business because of this law, and our citizens have a much healthier indoor environment. The science is clear; there is no safe level of secondhand smoke. And there is no logical reason for private clubs to remain exempt.

This is bad public policy that needs to change. Certainly, the private clubs will not fold if their members can't smoke. It should not matter whether John Smith is having a drink at the local watering hole, the VFW hall or at the Hartford Club smoking should not be allowed. This is a public health issue, not an unegalitarian "privilege".

And the best part is there is NO cost associated with passing the bill. Let's do the right thing and get rid of this archaic and unhealthy exemption.

MOBILIZE AGAINST TOBACCO FOR CONNECTICUT'S HEALTH