



Health  
Education in support of a better community  
Logistics  
Performance

# WHY NOT SMOKE FREE

## Open letter to St. Marys County Commissioners



\*Data source: Maryland Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) & MOTA 2017 Youth survey

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St. Mary's County has long held a reputation of being something of a paradise for smokers. Tobacco is/was at least for St. Mary's County a standard to many local framers a life style. People could light up in many of the county's restaurants and bars. In fact, before the turn of the century smokers could pretty much puff away on a cigarette anywhere.

There was little social stigma against smokers — smokers were accepted as a fairly-ordinary part of society. People smoked near women who were pregnant or in-close proximity to children. If others didn't want their clothes or hair to reek of smoke, it was up to them to find a smoke-free space.

Within the past decade, the countryside and state's view on smoking has changed significantly. Many municipal areas now prohibit smoking in public spaces occupied by resident of the area. while several establishments have either created segregated smoking and nonsmoking sections in dining rooms or introduced no-smoking rules. Med-Star St. Mary's Hospital and many companies, have laid down a complete ban on smoking. The retail price of cigarettes has even increased a little.

Despite the progress, St. Mary's County still lags behind other industrialized counties in Maryland when it comes to anti-smoking measures. The Minority Outreach Coalition is aware of the St. Mary's County Health Department's recent presentation to the Board of County Commission on the state of health of all county residents.

So, we must ask do politicians and businesses involved in hospitality have a vested interest in the tobacco industry? The Minority Outreach Coalition (MOC) has labored to enact an ordinance to prevent smoking in public places since 2009. Our outreach has spark controversy because we strive to ban smoking in public facilities such as hospitals, schools, large and small restaurants, and hotels with a goal to either, ban smoking altogether or segregate smokers from non-smokers.

The Minority Outreach Coalition represents a group of coalition partners that are overwhelming concern with the battle of tobacco use in public places, our schools and dismantling the opposition of laws that support the tobacco industries.

Our local government is in a unique position to

- **Reduce exposure to secondhand smoke & prevalence of tobacco use**
- **Increase the number of tobacco users who quit**
- **Reduce the initiation of tobacco use among young people**
- **Reduce tobacco-related morbidity and mortality, including acute cardiovascular events**

- **Reduce healthcare costs substantially**
- **Publicize the evidence that shows smoke-free policies do not have an adverse economic impact on businesses, including bars and restaurants**

The Minority Outreach Coalition and its attested partners urge the Board of County Commissioners to focus on the aspects of the problem St. Mary's County face with tobacco and tobacco related use within our county.

\*Tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of premature death and disability in the United States. Smoking causes heart disease, stroke, cancer and lung diseases (including asthma, emphysema, bronchitis and chronic airway obstruction) and diabetes. For every person who dies from smoking related disease - 30 more suffer at least one serious illness from smoking.

\*The leading causes of death in St. Mary's County is Heart disease, Cancer, Stroke, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and Diabetes. With lung cancer accounting for the highest percentage in St. Mary's County (28%). Nearly half of the high school students in the county live with someone who smokes.

It is evident that we have a long way to go to curb the smoking environment in the home, but our public parks and recreations area can be assisted today through your legislation and mandating a smoke free policy. Establishing Smoke-Free grounds in our Parks and Recreation area will eliminate the at-risk conditions of second-hand and third-hand smoke.

Third-hand smoke is generally considered to be residual nicotine and other chemicals left on a variety of indoor/outdoor surfaces by tobacco smoke. This residue is thought to react with common pollutants to create a toxic mix. This toxic mix of third-hand smoke contains cancer-causing substances, posing a potential health hazard to non-smokers who are exposed to it, especially children.

Studies show that third-hand smoke clings to hair, skin, clothes, furniture, drapes, walls, bedding, carpets, dust, vehicles and other surfaces, even long after smoking has stopped. Infants, children and non-smoking adults may be at-risk of tobacco-related health problems when they inhale, ingest or touch substances containing third-hand smoke. Third-hand smoke is a relatively new concept, and researchers are still studying its possible dangers.

In contrast, second-hand smoke is the smoke and other airborne products that come from being close to burning tobacco products, such as cigarettes.

The only way to protect non-smokers from third-hand smoke is to create a smoke-free environment, whether that's your private home or vehicle, or in public places, such as hotels, restaurants and our public parks and recreation facilities.

In all reality, a Smoke Free environment works, \*MedStar hospital associates reduced the number of tobacco users from 26.8% in 2012 to 1.7% in 2016. Our current smokers rate in St. Marys County is 20.9% while all of Maryland is at 16.3%. Our youth smoking rate in St. Marys County is at 19.2 % while all of Maryland is at 16.9%.

The Minority Outreach Coalition and our partners have been educating on Tobacco Awareness since 2009 through funding from Department of Health and Mental Hygiene or the Maryland Cigarette Restitution Fund through MHHD and since the formulation of the Tobacco Free Living Coalition in 2015 we met or exceeded our education and cessation goals. We strongly feel we can move to the next phase of assisting the public by having the laws for our Parks and Recreation areas augmented to include a Smoke Free status and we look forward to your participation and willingness to enact Smoke-Free regulations on all St. Mary's County Recreation and Park Public grounds and facilities.

**Submitted**

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Minority Outreach and Technical Assistance – St. Mary's County

**Attested by.**

Kirk Miller, Exalted Ruler Pride of St. Marys Lodge #1120 (28 Members)

Paulette Young, Order of the Eastern Star, Fidelity Chapter #60 (28 Members)

Dr. Janice Walthour, President St. Mary's Chapter NAACP (140 members)

Darwin Boothe, Worshipful Master Joseph A. Egans Lodge#104 (PHA) 42 members)