



Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

March 27, 2017

The Hon. Brad Wenstrup
Chairman, Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Veterans Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Wenstrup:

The Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service (COA) wants to go on record as supporting HR 1662, your bill that would prohibit smoking in any facility of the Veterans Health Administration. COA is a non-profit organization that has represented the interests of officers in the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) since 1951 and currently has some 4500 of the 6600 active duty USPHS officers among its membership.

The USPHS has long been associated with anti-smoking initiatives, dating to 1964, when then-Surgeon General (Dr.) Luther Terry presented to the public the first comprehensive survey of scientific studies that demonstrated the connection between smoking and cancer. Subsequent Surgeon General reports highlighted the dangers of second-hand smoke. COA is a strong advocate for smoke-free areas.

The Defense Department estimates that 175,000 current military servicemembers will die from smoking unless they quit. These men and women are the future patients at VA healthcare facilities. To put that 175,000 number into perspective, that is more military personnel than were killed in battle during World War I, Korea, and Vietnam together. Having smoke-free areas at VA medical facilities will undoubtedly contribute to a decrease in the number of deaths among veterans. We understand how hard it might be for some veterans to give up their cigarettes for whatever time they spend in a VA facility, but we believe that our government owes it to these men and women to help them kick the smoking habit. Making VA facilities smoke-free will definitely be a start toward doing so.

Sincerely,

Col. James T. Currie, USA (ret.)
Executive Director