

Heart Disease and Stroke. You're the Cure.



**House Public Health Committee: House Bill 670 by Rep. Myra Crownover
Presented by: John Carlo, MD, on behalf of the
American Heart Association, Texas Medical Association, Texas Academy of Family
Physicians, Texas Pediatric Society, and Texas Public Health Coalition
Date: March 2, 2011**

Good morning/afternoon, Chair Kolkhorst and members of the committee. My name is John Carlo. I am a physician from Dallas and formerly the medical director for Dallas County Health and Human Services, and the health authority for Dallas County. I serve on the American Heart Association's State Advocacy Committee and the Texas Medical Association's Council on Science and Public Health. I am very privileged to be representing today the American Heart Association, and the nearly 48,000 physicians of the Texas Medical Association, the Texas Pediatric Society, and the Texas Academy of Family Physicians. I'm also here on behalf of the thousands of public health advocates of the Texas Public Health Coalition, which consists of 23 diverse public health organizations.

I am here to testify in support of House Bill 670, which would eliminate smoking in workplaces and public places. There is no doubt after looking at the scientific studies: Smoking is the major factor causing death from heart disease, cancer, stroke, and respiratory disease in Texas, and secondhand smoke causes significant harm in our communities. Tobacco-smoke pollution causes about 53,000 deaths in the United States every year. The only way to truly prevent exposure is to create smoke-free spaces.

I live in the City of Dallas, where we passed our smoke-free ordinance in 2008. It's made a difference. I am urging you today to make Texas no longer one of the 11 remaining states without smoke-free legislation.

We have known conclusively since 1986 that secondhand smoke is dangerous to children and adults. The U.S. surgeon general continues to reaffirm this knowledge: There is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. There is a clear biological explanation as to how secondhand smoke exposure causes damage to blood vessels and the heart. There are clear and compelling epidemiological studies that demonstrate an increase in cardiac disease and mortality with increasing exposure to secondhand smoke. These reports do not review only a few studies or reports. If you look on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website, you'll find a database of hundreds of published studies confirming the dangers of tobacco and cigarette smoking.

The Pueblo Heart Study that took place in Colorado is one of the most compelling studies demonstrating the benefits of smoke-free workplaces. This study found a 27-percent decrease in hospital admission rates due to heart attacks compared with the outlying areas of Pueblo County and Colorado Springs, which did not pass similar ordinances. Further, a follow-up study found this reduction continued for three years beyond the implementation of the ordinance. On a positive note, we cannot continue to observe this “experiment” because in 2006 the State of Colorado passed a statewide smoking ban, effectively removing our control groups.

The Pueblo study is just an example of a growing list of studies, which in aggregate demonstrate a 6-47 percent reduction in cardiovascular hospitalizations after passage of smoke-free regulations. A recent Institute of Medicine report concluded that secondhand smoke exposure increases the risk of coronary heart disease by 25-30 percent.

By prohibiting smoking in public places, House Bill 670 protects innocent Texans from inhaling the 250 known hazardous chemicals produced by cigarette smoke. Being a public health physician, I see this as just like our other public health prevention measures, such as ensuring our drinking water is clean, that our children are not exposed to dangerous levels of lead, or that the food we eat is free from contamination of pathogens. This is a measure to protect the public’s health, and we should take this step now to promote healthy communities.

Thank you to Rep. Myra Crowover for sponsoring this important legislation. And thank you for allowing me to speak to this very important public health issue today.

I’m more than happy to answer any questions you may have.