

# Religious Leaders Pushing for Statewide Smoking Ban

By Eric Berman

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Hoosier religious leaders are wading into the legislative debate over a statewide smoking ban.

Lutheran, Baptist and Methodist pastors led about 30 people to the statehouse to urge senators to not only pass the smoking ban, but remove the House-passed exemptions for bars and casinos.

The Indiana Faith and Health Coalition formed two years ago to join the push for a ban. Its members include about 20 Indiana Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders.

Supporters of the ban placed hundreds of tiny light bulbs in the statehouse rotunda in the shape of a no-smoking symbol before heading upstairs to lobby. Northside New Era Baptist pastor Clarence Moore led a brief prayer to give legislators wisdom, and urging them to "put life before profit."

Moore and Reverend Dan Gangler with the United Methodist Church's Indiana Area say the health dangers of smoking are so severe as to make the ban a moral issue. But Gangler says it's primarily a health issue, and maintains bar and casino owners' warnings of lost business are "a myth."

The stimulus bill sets aside an additional \$14 million for which Indiana communities can apply directly to the U.S. Justice Department.

Senate Commerce and Public Policy Chairman Ronnie Alting (R-Lafayette) has said he'll give the bill a hearing, but has not yet announced a date. The Senate will spend the next five-and-a-half weeks considering bills which have passed the House.