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Statewide ban on smoking urged

Lawmaker wants to make bars and casinos smoke-free

By Mike Smith
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS -- Smoking would be snuffed out in almost all enclosed public places in Indiana, including restaurants, bars, bowling alleys and casinos, under a bill a powerful state lawmaker plans to push in the upcoming legislative session.

"It is a public health issue," said state Rep. Charlie Brown, D-Gary, chairman of the House Public Health Committee.

Brown will have plenty of backing from a coalition called the Indiana Campaign for Smokefree Air, a group of more than 30 organizations that includes the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

The coalition held a town hall meeting in Fort Wayne this week to advocate a ban on smoking in all enclosed workplaces in Indiana, and plans similar events in other cities across the state, said Tim Filler, the group's grassroots committee chairman.

He said nonsmoking employees in enclosed public places where smoking is allowed are being treated like secondhand citizens because they are subject to secondhand smoke.

But Brown will face opposition from some powerful lobbying groups, including the Indiana Licensed Beverage Association, which represents about 700 bars, restaurants and taverns. The Casino Association of Indiana, which represents 12 of Indiana's 13 casinos, will at least seek an exemption for casinos.

Both organizations said smoking bans in the venues they represent would hurt business badly.

"Tobacco is a legal product, and adults should be able to enjoy a legal product around other adults," said Brad Klopfenstein, executive director of the Licensed Beverage Association.

As of Oct. 2, 29 states, along with Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, have smoke-free laws in effect that cover either workplaces, restaurants, bars, or combinations of some or all of such places, according to the American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation.

