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Business, Consumers, Workers Form Coalition Against Over-Regulation By State Government

For Immediate Release

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Calling the latest efforts by state bureaucrats "the regulations of the absurd," more than 1,200 Maryland residents today announced formation of the Maryland Coalition Against Excessive Government Regulation. The Coalition is specifically targeting a May 3 public hearing on proposed regulations affecting how workplaces handle tobacco smoke.

"We've banded together because we are fed up with the state's efforts to force unrealistic and intrusive regulations on our businesses, particularly during tough economic times," said Frank Velleggia, chairman of the Coalition.

Frank Velleggia specifically singled out the Maryland Occupational Safety and Health (MOSH) department's proposed smoking prohibition. "It's like someone directed the regulators to use every trick they've ever imagined to control the lives not only of Maryland's businesspeople, but every citizen living within our borders," Mr. Velleggia said.

"The way they've written these regulations," Velleggia said, "not only is MOSH mandating the physical condition of every workplace in the state but is appointing every citizen a policeman to watch for any violations."

The regulations would prohibit smoking in any workplace. The employer would be required to police the actions of employees or customers, and employees or customers would be expected to police employers. Violation of the regulations carries a \$7,000 fine for the first offense and up to \$70,000 for multiple violations.

Velleggia said, "For one thing, these regulations would require proprietors to spend thousands of dollars to meet what the state says are the standards to allow smoking in some areas. Next, the way the regulations define a workplace, it is not just any bar or restaurant, but a bowling alley, a motel room, a boat, a car and possibly even your home!" Mr. Velleggia added that "those of us in the hospitality industry will be constantly subjecting our customers to the whims of our employees -- in other words, my employees could sue me if a customer happens to light up in my restaurant, whether I'm there or not."

"If you are driving your baby-sitter home, your car becomes a workplace under the legal definition. If you smoke, your baby-sitter can turn you in," Velleggia said.

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The Commissioner of MOSH is holding a public hearing on the proposed regulations May 3. Velleggia said coalition members will encourage Maryland citizens to speak strongly against the regulations.

"Imagine heading out for your weekly bowling night and the state mandating that you can't smoke while you bowl? Or, what if a restaurant loses clients to a competitor across the border because the Marylander wants to avoid the hassle of our state's regulations? The bottom line is, Maryland businesses lose money," Velleggia said.

"These regulations go way beyond what's fair and reasonable. When the government starts telling me what it will allow in my homes, car, boat, business -- anywhere -- then it's no longer a smoking issue, it's an issue of who's running my life, me or the state?" Velleggia said.

Velleggia also announced that his coalition has a toll-free number (800\964-8752) for anyone who wants more information on these proposed regulations or who wants to know how they can comment on them.

The Coalition, officially formed in just the last few days, already has over 1,200 members. Members range from consumers to business owners, workers, restaurateurs, and bowling alley proprietors.

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