

**Testimony in Support of H.B. #682  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
Health Committee  
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**Stephen Kalinoski  
skward6@yahoo.com**

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

My name is Stephen Kalinoski. I have been the Manager for the Glenside VFW in Montgomery County for over 9 years. When I began my work with the Club, we were on the verge of bankruptcy. We developed a business plan and turned the Club around. Today we book parties and events all at a smoke free venue.

In January of 2015, our Club went smoke free. People told us we would not survive, but we did. Patrons told us they would not come back, but they did.

There was no push back from the veterans. There was nothing but support. Today's members expect nonsmoking environments. It is what they know and grew up with. We have not told anyone they can't smoke, instead we have implemented ways to accommodate those who do smoke. There are areas designated outside for smokers. We added more park benches, more smoking waste receptacles, and identified areas as smoking.

In the original Clean Indoor Air Law, private clubs were exempted because legislators were afraid to tell their local VFW, Elks, Moose, Italian or Polish Clubs they could no longer put toxic chemicals into the air by smoking indoors. Many of today's clubs are made up of just as many social members as veterans. Unfortunately, Clubs in general do not have to register with the State, so no one knows, first, how many Clubs there are and second, how many are smoke-free.

The VFW has been trying for many years to attract new members. In 2006, when VFW Commander-in-Chief Gary Kurpius was inducted at the national level, he asked the following probing yet simple question:

“ What are we going to do to make ourselves more attractive?

With so many options and such little free time, if the new generation does get involved in the VFW, they will want to participate in programs that benefit the entire family — but I guarantee you that no one will want to join a VFW health club ... or bring their children to a VFW day care center ... or log-on at a VFW Cyber Café ... as long as smoking is still permitted indoors.

We are a democratic organization that is letting 20 percent of the population tell us that the Post will fail if people can't smoke inside. That's bunk.

I know many VFW members and spouses who will not attend Post meetings or events because of the secondhand smoke. I have read many articles about the VFW being the last building in town where indoor smoking is still permitted ... and some members quoted in the newspaper that they are celebrating this fact as if they just won a great battle against government and social interference.

Comrades, that is not a victory, it is a sad commentary that unfortunately paints all of us with the same brush. American society and the VFW National Office have changed with the times, and so must you if you want your Post to survive. Having your Post join the list of 148 other Posts that either closed or consolidated this past year because of membership problems is not a victory in anyone's book — it's a failure of leadership.

I ask that you take that thought back home with you and remember that *we are a "service organization" first and foremost* — and our future rests with attracting new members who want to believe that the VFW is more than just a bar ... and who want to believe that the VFW is an organization that regards change as a recognition of the future and not a criticism of the past.

These comments support what so many others have told me over the past several years. Everyone is so afraid of change and what it will do, I am here to tell you change is essential for survival. This change includes making all private clubs smoke free.

I am urging you, on behalf of many other individuals throughout the Commonwealth, to please protect the lungs of all of those who have served our country and support H.B. #682.

Thank you.