

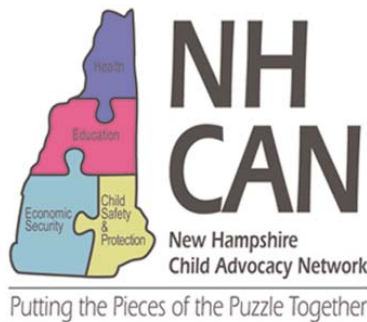
Safeguard foster care children by protecting the air they breathe

Issue Overview

We have a duty to keep the children in our foster care system safe. As issues that have the potential to jeopardize the safety of those children are discovered, it is important that we act on that information. An issue that is now coming to the forefront is the need to provide guidance to dedicated foster parents about the devastating effects of secondhand smoke on the children in their care. The Surgeon General's Report on Childhood and Secondhand Smoke Exposure indicates that there is no safe level of this environmental hazard for children. Asthma, allergies, inner ear infections and bronchitis are some of the health consequences to children who live in homes where smoking is permitted. The younger the child, the sicker the child, the more time they spend with their caregiver -- the more important it is to have foster parents take extra measures to keep secondhand smoke away from that child. The impact of secondhand smoke poses a real health threat for all children, but for the approximately 1400 children in foster care, the health risks are even greater because many of these children come into the system with respiratory health issues.

Proposed Solution

Providing education, support and guidance through policy and regulatory change, foster parents who smoke



will be asked not to do so while foster children are in their home. While the state may be reluctant to interfere with children who are exposed to secondhand smoke by their natural parents, they should have no hesitation to protect foster children from the risks that occur when these children are exposed to tobacco smoke. These children are wards of the state and as such, the state is duty bound to protect them. The Medicaid costs of treating

foster children with the number of diseases related to secondhand smoke are costly to taxpayers, so prohibiting smoking in homes where foster children reside is a low cost measure that will reduce the medical expenditures.

Call to Action

One of the major fears in any state that wants to introduce policy and regulatory changes aimed at eliminating secondhand smoke in foster homes is the fear that this will have a negative impact on the number of individuals willing to take in foster children. While this presents a challenge, the health of foster children requires that this challenge start to be addressed. This initiative for foster homes to be free from secondhand smoke takes into account the fine balance between the needs and rights of the people who are providing an incredible service by opening their homes to foster children and the

The 2008 Priorities for New Hampshire's Children

NH CAN is a statewide, nonpartisan network of nearly 100 child-serving organizations working to improve the health and well-being of New Hampshire's children by driving governmental policy, changing budget priorities, and inspiring community action. Each year, NH CAN develops a collective set of Priorities for New Hampshire's Children, a child-centered plan of action for the legislature, state leaders, state agencies, social service providers, schools, communities and families. The Priorities for New Hampshire's Children reflects the consensus of nearly 100 partner organizations, and creates a common call to action that can be shared across our state.

need to bring those homes in line with the latest scientific evidence from the Surgeon General of the United States that secondhand smoke at any level poses a severe health risk to children. Working together to start an awareness campaign and to change social norms on the matter of second hand smoke and its impact on foster children will begin to start the dialogue on this important issue. We also need to work as a team with State agencies, community partners and foster parents to help craft policies and regulations that work to benefit both the child while at the same time maintaining the willingness of existing and future foster parents to continue their important work.

Find Out More

- Breathe New Hampshire is the lead NH CAN partner for this Priority. More information is available online here: <http://www.breathenh.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page.aspx?pid=193&srcid=-2>
- The Child Welfare League Children's Voice publications: <http://www.cwla.org/voice/0605health.htm>



- The Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov/tobacco
- The Environmental Protection Service: www.epa.gov/smokefree
- The Tobacco Policy Center: www.tobaccopolicy.org
- Action on Smoking and Health: <http://ash.org>
- Foster Carers and Smoking: www.nsc.org/ehr/indoor/smokemod.htm
- New Hampshire General Court. You can follow the progress of the bill, or find contact information for your local representatives by going to <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/default.htm>.
- Children's Alliance of New Hampshire: You can download copies of the complete Priorities for New Hampshire's Children, additional fact sheets, and information about the New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network at the Children's Alliance website, www.childrennh.org. You can also track the progress of all the Priorities-related bills, as well as contact your local representatives, under the "Get Active" link.

References

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- ⁷ Foster Carers and Smoking, June 2007



NH CAN is a project of the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire

For more information on the *2008 Priorities for New Hampshire's Children*, please visit www.ChildrenNH.org
2 Greenwood Avenue, Concord, NH 03301 (603) 225-2264