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For Release: Immediate
Thursday, September 17, 2009

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BUONO BILL WOULD BAN SMOKING IN PUBLIC PARKS AND BEACHES

Citing studies that document the health risks to non-smokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke, as well as environmental concerns, Sen. Barbara Buono (D-Middlesex) said today she is introducing a bill to ban smoking at all state, county and municipal parks and beaches.

"While cigarette smoking has declined dramatically since the first Surgeon General's report more than 40 years ago, tobacco continues to take a deadly toll," Sen. Buono said. "A report on tobacco use in America by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies found that among the 440,000 annual deaths caused by tobacco are 50,000 non-smokers killed by the smoking of others."

Sen. Buono, chairwoman of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee, said the IM report points out smoking kills more people each year than AIDS, alcohol use, cocaine use, heroin use, homicides, suicides, motor vehicle accidents and fires, combined.

An avid runner, Senator Buono has drawn from her personal experiences running in public parks, prompting this legislation. "This issue has been on my agenda for a long time," Sen. Buono said. "Now we have empirical data which support the passage of this public health and environmental protection measure."

She said other cities and states have banned or are considering banning smoking in public parks and beaches. New York City's health commissioner recently held a press conference with Mayor Bloomberg to announce a plan to ban smoking in public parks and city beaches.

A Stanford University study published in the Journal of the Air and Waste Management Association, (JAWMA) in 2007, represents the first peer-reviewed publication providing evidence that levels of outdoor tobacco smoke (OTS) can be substantial under certain circumstances. Children who accompany a smoking parent or guardian outdoors can experience significant exposure to tobacco smoke, the study found. It also found that even short-term exposure to outdoor tobacco smoke for people who are at risk of coronary heart disease or have known coronary artery disease "might be life threatening."

"This in-depth study substantiates that even brief exposure within a few feet of someone smoking outdoors can be significant. That finding, which measures OTS and estimates its health risks, must guide outdoor tobacco control policy," Sen. Buono said.

She said the Institute of Medicine report found restrictions on smoking in public protect non-smokers from second-hand smoke, help smokers quit or cut down on their smoking and reinforce non-smoking as a social norm.

Buono noted a similar ban limited to state parks and parts of state beaches, has been proposed in California, where the sponsors have cited the damage to the marine environment, in addition to the well-documented health risks to non-smokers. The sponsor of the California bill pointed out that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has determined cigarette butts are the most frequently found marine debris item in the United States. And wild fires caused

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by cigarettes have destroyed thousands of homes and property in California and caused literally billions of dollars in damage.

"Cigarettes are legal and adults have the right choose whether they want to smoke," Sen. Buono said. "But they don't have a right to impose upon the non-smoking public the health risks and environmental degradation caused by smoking. Our public parks and beaches are paid for by taxpayers and should be available for use by everyone without having to worry about being harmed by the hazards associated with secondhand smoke."

Sen. Buono's bill will be introduced when the Senate next convenes, and would apply to state, county and municipal parks and beaches.

A health and wellness advocate, Sen. Buono is the prime sponsor of Senate bill 1115 which would extend a business tax credit to provide employees with benefits that promote physical fitness and well-being. Sen. Buono is the prime sponsor of the bill, signed into law in 2005, which prohibits smoking in any building used as a student dormitory that is owned and operated by an institution of higher education. She is also the prime sponsor of the "Global Warming Response Act" signed into law in 2007.

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