

# NEWS



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## FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE JOHN FRITCHEY

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
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### **Legislator Seeks to Snuff Out Smoking in Dorms** *Measure seeks to encourage both fire safety and public health*

Chicago – As students return to college campuses around the state, State Representative John Fritchey (D-Chicago) today announced the introduction of a new measure to prohibit smoking in the residence halls of all public and private universities in Illinois. State law currently bans smoking in public buildings such as educational institutions, but does not regulate private living quarters, an area where many students spend the majority of their time and where most fires break out.

“It is always the right time to be concerned about fire safety and public health,” stated Rep. Fritchey. “But as our students are going back to the books, we need to make sure that they are doing so in as safe an environment as possible.”

The new measure would amend the Illinois Clean Indoor Air Act, which presently bans smoking in educational facilities, but does not apply to living quarters. While the majority of Illinois’ universities already have a smoking ban in place, notable exceptions include the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of Chicago in Hyde Park, and Eastern Illinois University in Charleston. Rep. Fritchey stated that he wants to standardize the issue with what he believes to be a commonsense, statewide provision.

“We know too much about fire safety as well as the toxic effects of secondhand smoke to ignore this issue,” stated Rep. Fritchey. “Schools should not be knowingly placing students into a harmful environment.”

Data from the National Fire Protection Association cites smoking as one of the leading causes of fires in student housing. These fires often originate in dorm rooms and cause excessive damage to property, displaced students, and in serious cases, injury or death.

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“I am in complete support of this measure by State Rep. Fritchey which will prohibit smoking in all college dormitories,” stated Alan Berkowsky, Chief of Fire and Life Safety Services for the City of Evanston. “Dormitories are small and congested and are not conducive to smoking from a fire safety viewpoint. Smoking in these rooms is a fire hazard.”

Research from the Harvard School of Public Health shows that students entering college as non-smokers are 40% less likely to adopt the habit when they live in smoke-free housing. Additionally, the American College Health Association encourages its 900-member colleges to ban smoking in campus-owned and sanctioned housing. Despite this recommendation, only 27% of colleges prohibit smoking in dormitories.

"Secondhand smoke is one of the most toxic indoor air substances containing sixty-nine chemicals that cause cancer. It is unfortunate that many college students in Illinois, especially freshmen, are being exposed involuntarily," said Janet Williams of the American Lung Association. "We applaud Representative Fritchey for sponsoring legislation that will ensure safe and healthy environments for students at all of our colleges and universities."

The legislation will put Illinois at the forefront of protecting university students from these dangers. Connecticut and New Jersey have similar laws on the books, while Wisconsin bans smoking in public universities. New York is presently considering legislation on the issue. Fritchey plans to file the bill when the General Assembly reconvenes in January.