

Pa. casino worker: Stop making me breathe in secondhand smoke

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 08 September 2021 08:35 -

I started working as a casino dealer in Atlantic City in the summer of 2003. I was young, in my mid-20s, and not really bothered by secondhand smoke, even though I'd been diagnosed with asthma as a child and remained asthmatic into adulthood. About 10 years into my career, my asthma worsened. I felt the symptoms more on the days I worked in a smoking section. At one point, I missed a few months of work recovering from foot surgery, and during those months, my asthma was extremely mild and practically nonexistent.

On my first day back following surgery, though, the stench of cigarette smoke brought all the feelings back. My throat was sore, my voice was weakened, and my breathing was labored. Over the next several years, I did anything I could to switch my schedule to avoid dealing in a smoking section. The problem was that many other dealers were also trying to avoid smoking sections. That's why casino employees like me are urging state legislators to finally close the [casino loophole](#) that treats us differently than all other workers and forces us to breathe harmful secondhand smoke while on the job.

» ***[READ MORE: Atlantic City's casinos — all but one — reopen with no smoking, drinking, or eating inside \(from July 2020\)](#)***

When the pandemic shut the casinos down in March 2020, we couldn't work for nearly four months. Coming back, most of us dealers thought the silver lining in this pandemic was that smoking in casinos would finally be banned for good.

How naïve we were.

Two months ago, and after many months without indoor smoking, I walked onto the casino floor and felt like I'd been punched in the stomach. My table had ash trays all over it. A sign on my table read, "designated smoking section." I nearly vomited. I rushed into the human resources department on my first break. I'd switched to dealing at a Pennsylvania casino, to be closer to home, and the Commonwealth had just given casinos the green light to permit indoor smoking once again. The same thing happened to my former colleagues in Atlantic City on July 4.

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It was a rough day. If not for a two-year-old daughter and my family, I would have walked out and resigned. There are only so many accommodations that the casino is willing to make. That's why I'm now looking for other jobs that will allow me to support my family and not risk my health. For many of my fellow dealers in Atlantic City, though, limited job opportunities exist outside of gaming.

I feel deceived by the lawmakers of Pennsylvania and New Jersey who allow smoking to continue in casinos, putting employees' health at risk every day. The people who make these decisions do not recognize the environment they are creating. They don't grasp what it's like to be on the casino floor breathing secondhand smoke every day for eight hours. They don't get that we cannot just easily walk away from our career.

The scare tactics about going smoke-free hurting business are dramatically overblown. The same people I see smoking in the casino now are mostly the same people I saw every day during the pandemic when smoking was banned, and they had no problem stepping outside to smoke.

A loophole in both state's laws means workers like me are treated differently than every other worker — and we are more energized than we've ever been to finally close the loophole. Governors Tom Wolf and Phil Murphy, as well as New Jersey Senate President Steve Sweeney, must prioritize our health and take action immediately. New Jersey's lame duck session later this year is the perfect time to finally close the loophole.

Until this happens, their statements and social media posts in support of workers will ring hollow. It's time for action.

Mike Danay is the father of a two-year-old girl and a dealer at a Pennsylvania casino. He previously spent nearly two decades working at an Atlantic City casino.

Read more <https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/smoking-casinos-pennsylvania-new-jersey-20210908.html>