

ple. Study after study confirms that disproportionate numbers of lesbian and gay adults and youth smoke.

"By giving a perfect score to Reynolds American, the HRC is promoting health inequalities, not corporate equality," he said. "Until tobacco companies stop selling addiction and disease to LGBT communities, they should not be included in an index of equality."

Lee's page-and-a-half letter was referenced and cited 25 times with research studies and reports, some as recent as this year, showing that LGBT people are more likely to start smoking because of stress from discrimination and oppression, persistent and targeted advertising by the industry and exposure to smoking environments, such as gay clubs and bars.

"For better or worse, bars and clubs have long been an important part of our communities," Lee told *Q-Notes*. "Many bars are, in fact, paid by the tobacco industry to allow and promote smoking. It is the social environment of smoky places, discrimination and targeted marketing that pushes LGBT youth to start smoking."

Sally Herndon Malek, director of the Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch at the N.C. Division of Public Health, told *Q-Notes* that her program had attempted to gather information specific to North Carolina lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) communities and their smoking habits.

In 2004, she and other staff attended the NC Pride Fest and Parade in Durham. Out of a small sample of 136 surveys collected there — one of the only Carolina-specific attempts

at LGB tobacco use data collection — Malek found a higher rate of smoking among LGB adults (42 percent) than the general population of adults in the state (24.8 percent, in the same time period). Among non-smoking LGB respondents, 47 percent said they were most exposed to second-hand smoke in bars.

In particular, her community survey showed that 59 percent of the North Carolina LGB youths aged 18-24 reported using tobacco products. She said that only 31.3 percent of youth the same age report smoking in the general population.

"Rates are higher across North Carolina in that population [of 18-24 year olds] in general because there was a cohort of young people who were smoking at higher rates," she said. "We have been successful in North Carolina, beginning to put some things into practice that really help prevent tobacco use initiation among young people."

In a publication of the community survey results, Malek and her staff ceded that the sample size was small, but that the data collected provided "some insight into tobacco use prevalence in the LGB population in North Carolina."

Daryl Herrschaft, director of the HRC Foundation Workplace Project, told *Q-Notes* via phone that the national organization is cognizant of the health-related ramifications of tobacco use. "HRC does not accept sponsorship dollars from tobacco companies because we recognize the harmful effects that tobacco has done, and in some ways its disproportionate effect on our community ... We don't want to play a role in advocating smoking to our membership and to people who come to our events."

He said the CEI scores aren't meant to reflect anything other than a company's treatment of LGBT employees.

"The Corporate Equality Index addresses only corporate policies that impact LGBT people," Herrschaft said. "It also addresses

external actions of the company that directly and primarily impact LGBT equality. The Corporate Equality Index is only one measure of policies for LGBT employees and we

strongly encourage everyone to seek out and pay attention to other indicators that are important to them."

see *HRC* on 16

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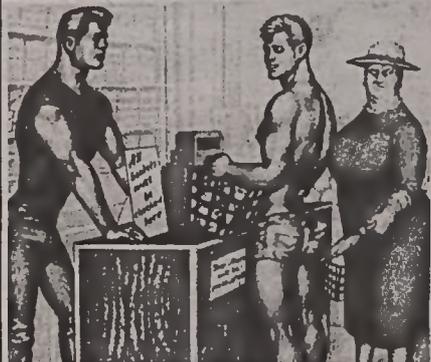
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