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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MAJORITY OF MASON COUNTY VOTERS WANT SMOKE-FREE WORKPLACES**  
***Support for smoke-free public buildings and workplaces continues to grow***

Maysville, KY – Sixty-seven percent of Mason County voters said they would favor a county-wide ordinance that would make all public buildings, workplaces, bars, and restaurants smoke-free. This statistic is just one finding of a professional opinion poll that surveyed registered voters in Mason County in December of 2017.

According to the official survey results, eighty-one percent of voters see secondhand smoke as a serious or moderate health hazard, with 61 percent of respondents said that the local government has the responsibility to protect the public from secondhand smoke, which causes nearly 50,000 deaths nationally every year. Sixty-nine percent of respondents agreed that a comprehensive smoke-free ordinance protects public health.

The results of the poll also show that majorities of smokers, former smokers, and non-smokers all support the idea of a county-wide indoor smoke-free ordinance. “As a former smoker, I believe having a smoke-free ordinance in our community will benefit those who want or are trying to quit smoking. Self-control only gets us so far in fighting the addiction to smoking. With boundaries to observe and policies by which to abide, the choice not to smoke is made for us, which makes limiting the amount we smoke easier and quitting more feasible,” said former-smoker Justa Thomas, a member of the Smoke-Free Partnership of Mason County. Furthermore, 84 percent of respondents disagreed that the right to smoke is greater than an employee or customer’s right to breathe smoke-free air in a public place.

The poll showed the majority of voters in every age category favor the ordinance, with the strongest support coming from people between the ages of 18 and 24, and 25 to 34. “In order to continue attracting young people and tourists, this community needs to make an extra effort to be welcoming,” said Justin Denham, Visioning Committee Chair for the Maysville Young Professionals Network. “Let’s not let smoking indoors get in the way.”

The poll was commissioned by the Buffalo Trace District Health Department (BTDHD) using grant funding from the Kentucky Tobacco Prevention & Cessation Program. “We asked for this survey to be conducted because it is the health department’s responsibility to educate the public about health threats and to advocate for policy change to protect everyone’s health,” said BTDHD Director Allison Adams. “We need to provide for a healthier space where our citizens can live, work, and play.”

BTDHD Public Health Policy Advocate Ellen Cartmell added that the same poll was conducted in 2007 and 2012, and, “and every time the results have shown more and more support for this kind of ordinance. Our support levels are now higher than Lexington’s when they went smoke-free back in 2004.”

While the Mason County poll did not inquire about respondents’ political affiliations, recent statewide polling by the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky showed that strong majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents all supported the idea of a state-wide smoke-free ordinance to protect indoor air quality. According to the foundation’s president, former US Congressman Ben Chandler, smoke-free ordinances are about, “protecting the freedom of all Kentuckians – both those who smoke and those who don’t, and including people of all ages, and at all income, education and job skills levels – to enjoy the health benefits of breathing smoke-free air in public and at work.”

Smoke-free indoor public places are already law in 37 states, including Ohio, and in many Kentucky communities. Lexington, Louisville, Morehead, Ashland, Paducah, Georgetown, and more than thirty other communities have already passed smoke-free ordinances in the past 15 years, according to the Kentucky Center for Smoke-Free Policy, hosted by the University of Kentucky College of Nursing. “The indoor air is much more polluted in Mason County than in communities that have smoke-free ordinances,” says Cartmell. “UK research last year showed on average it’s 7.7 times dirtier than in Georgetown and 8.5 times dirtier than in Lexington.”

Those who are interested in supporting a smoke-free ordinance are invited to reach out to the Smoke-Free Partnership of Mason County, a branch of the Mason County Health Coalition. The group can be found on Facebook, and uses the hashtag #SmokeFreeMasonCo.

The Buffalo Trace District Health Department (BTDHD) is the local government agency charged with protecting the health of Mason and Robertson County residents. The health department’s mission is to lead and empower communities to achieve better health.

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