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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 23, 2008

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Atlantic City to require 100% smoke-free casino gaming floors where employees work

Atlantic City's eleven casinos, where employees work, will be smoke-free on October 15, 2008. The Atlantic City Council voted unanimously, 9-0, to approve Ordinance #27 at their April 23 meeting. Mayor Evans is expected to sign the measure into law, within ten days.

"We applaud City Council and Mayor Evans for prioritizing the health and well-being of the casino workers and patrons," commends Karen Blumenfeld, Esq., Director of the Policy & Legal Resource Center, NJ GASP. "It's a testament to collaborative efforts amongst government, industry, workers and health advocates."

Air testing on the casino gaming floors showed high levels of fine particle air pollution. "When this new smoke-free workplace ordinance takes effect, we expect to see very good air quality measurements on the gaming floors in Atlantic City," says Mark Travers, a research affiliate with Roswell Park Cancer Institute.

Atlantic City casinos were given a reprieve to allow smoking only on the gaming floors, since April 15, 2006, when the New Jersey Smoke-Free Air Act went into effect. This carve-out resulted in casino workers and patrons continuing to be exposed to secondhand smoke on the gaming floors.

A year later, the City Council attempted to resolve the problem by permitting casinos to allocate up to 25% of their gaming floors as smoking-permitted. However, secondhand smoke continues to permeate the nonsmoking gaming areas. An outcry from casino workers and patrons, led the City Council, on April 9, 2008, to amend last year's ordinance, and mandate 100% smoke-free gaming floors where casino employees work. Casinos will be permitted to construct separately enclosed and ventilated non-staffed smoking lounges.

Atlantic City joins New Jersey's three racetrack facilities, and Favorite's simulcast in Vineland, all smoke-free by state law. More than a dozen U.S. state and local jurisdictions require smoke-free gaming, and fourteen more states have smoke-free bingo.

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