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HUD FINAL RULE ON SMOKE-FREE HOUSING WILL PROTECT MILLIONS FROM THE DANGERS OF SECONDHAND SMOKE

Statement of Robin Koval, CEO & President, Truth Initiative

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) final rule announced today, requiring each agency administering public housing to implement a smoke-free policy, is a big step toward protecting the health of millions of Americans. This final rule will provide safer living situations and shield residents from secondhand smoke in their homes.

Several studies have proven that secondhand smoke can permeate throughout multifamily housing, moving from units occupied by smokers into units occupied by nonsmokers. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found that although eight in 10 multiunit housing residents had smoke-free homes, about one-third of those residents reported experiencing secondhand smoke that involuntarily entered their home from other areas in their building. The 2006 Surgeon General's Report concluded that secondhand smoke indisputably increases the risk of serious respiratory problems and infections in children, and causes lung cancer and coronary heart disease in adults who do not smoke.

We applaud HUD for also including waterpipe/hookah tobacco in its smoke-free policy. Hookah involves combustion, and hookah smoke exposes users to many of the same toxicants found in cigarette smoke, and may place users at risk for many of the same diseases as cigarette smokers.

Public housing authorities should focus their enforcement efforts on educating smokers about the dangers of smoking and secondhand smoke, including the risks in a multi-unit environment, along with increasing the availability of cessation services. Eviction should not be used as an enforcement mechanism, as smoking is an extremely addictive behavior. While we believe e-cigarettes should be included in clean-air policies concerning public places, we are pleased that the new rule does not limit the use of these products in individual homes as these products provide smokers with an alternative to smoking that produces far less individual harm.