



Crescent City Passes Smokefree Multi-Unit Housing Ordinance

INTRODUCTION

After years of hard work from Del Norte County Tobacco Use Prevention Program (TUPP) staff and coalition members, the City Council of Crescent City voted 4-1 to pass a smokefree multi-unit housing (MUH) ordinance in November 2020. This ordinance prohibits smoking inside apartment units, on balconies and patios, in common areas, and within 25 feet of any residences.



OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

One of the biggest challenges of this effort was addressing the notion that protecting personal liberty and defending public health are incompatible. Del Norte TUPP staff focused on helping elected officials understand that smokefree MUH is not about forbidding someone from smoking, but rather represents an effort to protect tenants, especially children and the elderly, from dangerous secondhand smoke. It took years for TUPP staff and coalition members to build understanding through education efforts that included sharing community members' stories as well as survey results showing strong support for a policy from MUH tenants, landlords, and the local law enforcement agency.

STAND-OUT MOMENT

During one roundtable forum with key decision makers, a woman shared the story about how her family was impacted by secondhand smoke in their apartment. She explained that the smoke drifting from her neighbors' apartment was so bad it made her children's toothbrushes smell like smoke. She also shared that she recently had a baby, who came prematurely. At the hospital, the doctor told her that with such underdeveloped lungs, the baby could not go home without serious health consequences. She made the tough decision to move her family to her mom's home—45 minutes away from any medical services. Despite moving for health reasons, her landlord would not let her out of the lease agreement and she had to continue paying rent for the apartment. Her story was deeply moving and eye opening for decision makers who did not realize the gravity of this issue.

Although there can be extra challenges when it comes to working on tobacco control in rural communities, this achievement shows community members' voices have the power to bring real change.