

The Star Ledger

Smoking Ban at All Parks and Beaches Approved by Assembly Panel

By: Matt Freedman, 2/20/14

TRENTON — Smokers at all public parks and beaches would face fines ranging from \$250 to \$1,000 under a bill that has begun advancing in the Legislature.

The Assembly Tourism and Gaming Committee voted 7-0 today to approve the bill (**A1080**) during a brief meeting in which several witnesses spoke in favor of it and none spoke in opposition.

Anti-smoking advocates said the measure would encourage smokers to quit, set a better example for children and drastically reduce litter.

“If the adults aren’t smoking in front of them, hopefully the kids don’t start,” said Cindy Meakem, a coordinator at the Center for Prevention and Counseling.

Alan Kantz, program manager at the Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, said New Jersey towns that have already their own smoking bans in parks have seen a sharp reduction in litter.

“It’s a product that’s designed to be litter,” Kantz said. “If used as intended, you end up with this tiny little piece that’s not safe to put in your pocket, not safe to put in a garbage can. Clearly this product is intended to end up as litter, and indeed it does.”

The state already bans smoking in indoor public places, and this bill would expand that to include public parks and beaches run by the state, a county or municipality. Offenders would face fines of \$250 for the first offense, \$500 for the second and \$1,000 for any more.

Meakem said more than 220 New Jersey towns already ban smoking in parks.

“What we hear when we go out to the communities, or to the council people, is it’s a no-brainer,” she said.

In addition, 14 New Jersey towns already ban smoking on their beaches, both at the seashore and at lakes, according to the American Nonsmokers’ Rights Foundation.

Even though the bill was first introduced in four years ago, today was the first time it got a committee hearing.

“I think its time has come,” Assemblywoman Valerie Huttle (D-Bergen), sponsor of the measure said, and added that with more towns enacting smoking bans, a state law would make them more consistent.

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