

The Republic

Lawmakers OK Smoking Ban in New Jersey Parks, Limit at Beaches; Bill Goes to Christie

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TRENTON, New Jersey — New Jersey has moved a step closer to snuffing out smoking at its parks and beaches.

Smoking would be banned at state, county and municipal parks and limited at beaches under a measure approved by the Senate and Assembly Thursday. It now heads to Gov. Chris Christie's desk for consideration.

The bill would expand New Jersey's Smoke Free Act to include the recreation spaces, but would allow counties and municipalities to set aside up to 15 percent of a beach as a designated smoking area. The exemption would not apply to parks.

"This represents a great compromise. It helps protect people against harmful secondhand smoke while giving local governments the right to set aside small sections of their beaches for smokers," one of the bill's sponsors, Senate health committee chair Joseph Vitale, said in a statement.

The measure passed in the Senate, 30-3. The Assembly, which passed a bill in March calling for an outright ban, approved the measure 63-8, with five members abstaining. The governor has yet to weigh in on the changes, which he must sign for them to become law.

The bill is aimed at reducing exposure to secondhand smoke, litter and fire risks. Violators would be fined at least \$250 for a first offense, increasing to up to \$1,000 for repeated violations.

Some beach towns already ban smoking on their sands and more than a third of New Jersey's municipalities already have laws restricting smoking in parks and recreation areas. Towns with full bans on smoking at beaches will be able to keep them.

Jeff Tittel, the director of the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club, said the measure represented "a win for our lungs," but bemoaned the exemption, which he said would make the bill more difficult to enforce and undermine its goals.

"We think it's a loophole big enough to throw an ashtray through," he said, adding that he hoped lawmakers would later push for a total ban at beaches.

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