

The Star Ledger

Bill That Bans Smoking in NJ Parks and Limits Smoking on Beaches Passes Legislature

Susan K. Livio, June 26 2014

The state Legislature today approved a bill that would ban people from smoking in county and municipal parks but allow towns and counties to create a smoking section on their beaches.

After lawmakers agreed to a compromise sought by health and environmental advocates, the bill cleared the Assembly, 64-8, and the Senate 30-3. It now goes to Gov. Chris Christie.

Last month, the Senate health committee approved a version of the bill (S1772) that would have given county and municipal officials the authority to create a "smoking section" comprising 20 percent of any park or beach.

The New Jersey Sierra Club and **GASP - Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy - urged lawmakers to take the smoking ban further**. On Monday, the Senate agreed, and changed the bill to ban smoking outright in all parks.

Now, the bill would allow local and county officials to set up a smoking section only on beaches, and it would be limited to 15 percent of the land.

Smoking would be prohibited at state parks and state beaches, according to the bill, sponsored by Sen. Shirley Turner (D-Mercer).

Sen. Joseph Vitale (D-Middlesex), the other prime sponsor of the bill, said the legislation makes sense from both a public health and public safety perspective. "And no one needs to sit in an ashtray when enjoying the beach," he said.

Offenders would face a \$250 fine for the first offense, \$500 for the second and \$1,000 for additional offense.

"Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the state and the nation, and tobacco smoke constitutes a substantial health hazard to the nonsmoking majority of the public," said Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttel (D-Bergen), a sponsor. "The prohibition of smoking at public parks and beaches would better preserve the natural assets of this state by reducing litter and increasing fire safety in those areas, while lessening exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke among the public."

Anti-smoking advocates say at least 220 of New Jersey's 565 towns already ban smoking in parks, while at least 14 towns ban smoking on their beaches.

"This bill will not only help us all breathe easier and protect our health, but it will also help to protect parks from damages and fires from careless smokers," said Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club. "We are concerned that even though they banned smoking at parks and state beaches the bill still allows a 15 percent set aside for smoking

at local and municipal beaches. This 15 percent is a loophole you can throw an ashtray through.”

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of GASP, called the law "nationally groundbreaking," because it positions New Jersey "to be the first state in the United States to requires that all state, county and local parks, recreational areas and beaches be 100% smokefree."

http://www.nj.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/06/bill_banning_smoking_in_nj_parks_and_limits_smoking_on_beaches_passes_senate.html