

Asbury Park Press

Christie vetoes smoking ban for NJ beaches, parks

Michael Symons, September 10, 2014

TRENTON – Gov. Chris Christie has vetoed a bill that would have banned smoking in most areas of public beaches and parks statewide.

In his veto message issued Wednesday evening, Christie said the state shouldn't substitute its judgment for those of local officials. He said more than a dozen municipalities have local ordinances that ban smoking on beaches and 12 counties and more than 240 municipalities have local ordinances that ban smoking in municipal and county parks.

“I am not persuaded that a prescriptive, one-size-fits-all state ban on smoking at public parks and beaches is advisable at this time,” Christie wrote.

“Too often, policy-makers at more centralized levels of government encroach into areas of public policy previously reserved for more localized governing bodies,” he wrote. “Here, for example, local officials across the state over the past few years have thoughtfully considered whether, and to what extent, a ban on smoking at parks and beaches would be appropriate for their citizens. While some municipalities and counties have decided to impose prohibitions under certain circumstances, others have determined that their resources are better spent on other priorities.”

David Henry, health officer for the Monmouth County Regional Health Commission, which would have been responsible for enforcing the smoking ban in the 21 municipalities it serves, said he was disappointed by Christie's veto.

“As someone who help promote and institute the smoking ban in Princeton, I know first hand how difficult it is to pass a smoking ban locally,” Henry said via email. “A consistent statewide ban would have been preferable to many local prohibitions.”

At one time, the proposal would have established a complete ban on smoking on beaches and in public parks, but it was altered to allow for 15 percent of the area in a public beach to be designated by local officials as a smoking area.

The proposal was passed in June by votes of 30-3 in the Senate and 63-8 with five abstentions in the Assembly. The number of supporters in each house would be enough to override a veto, although in the past Republican lawmakers who have supported other bills have later been unwilling to vote to override Christie's rejection.

Christie added that nothing in state law prohibits state entities from restricting smoking at beaches or parks currently.

Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle, the bill's chief sponsor, said Christie is "standing in the way of a healthier New Jersey."

"This is extremely unfortunate from both a public health perspective and from an environmental perspective," said Vainieri Huttle, D-Bergen.

Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club, said Christie sided with the tobacco lobby because he "has a higher office in mind." Christie has said he will decide by early next year whether to seek the Republican nomination for president in 2016.

Michael Symons: 609-984-4336; msymons@app.com

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