

Garfield thinking about raising age to buy cigarettes to 21

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BY KRISTIE CATAFI, STAFF WRITER | COMMUNITY NEWS (GARFIELD EDITION)
catafi@northjersey.com

The age to buy cigarettes and tobacco may go up to 21 in Garfield.

Garfield is considering raising the legal age to purchase cigarettes and tobacco products to 21.

Global Advisors on Smoke-Free Policy (GASP) gave a presentation to the Garfield Council during the March 10 work session on the benefits on raising the age.

The current legal age is 19 but municipalities have been raising the age.

In New Jersey, Bogota, Englewood, Sayreville and Teaneck have raised the legal age to 21 to buy cigarettes and tobacco products.

GASP Executive Director Karen Blumfeld said 90 percent of smokers start before the age of 21. "Garfield has been a leader on tobacco control," she said.

In 2013, the city passed an ordinance making all city parks and facilities smoke free and in 2014 designated all tobacco retail establishments to a business zone on Route 46 and restricted them from opening within 1,000 feet of a school or church.

Garfield officials are reviewing the ordinance with their attorney and it could be on an upcoming meeting's agenda.

Representatives from the Garfield Prevention Coalition, an initiative of the Center for Drug and Alcohol Resources and a program of Children's Aid & Family Resources, were in attendance to show support for the age change.

"We support this idea and anything we can do to prevent our youth from starting," the coalition said.

Two Garfield high school students and members of community group Empowered Peers Inspiring Change (EPIC) also spoke on the importance of raising the age. The students said they are worried about how cigarettes are obtainable to minors.

Council members have said they support the ordinance and increasing the legal smoking age. Councilman Frank Calandriello also applauded the members of EPIC for being leaders and not being "afraid to speak up for what's right."

"I'm supporting this. I think when you're 21 years old you can make a more sound decision," Calandriello added.

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