

Hillsdale council introduces '21 and over' tobacco ordinance

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The Hillsdale Council introduced an ordinance that would prohibit the sale of tobacco products to anyone under age 21.

The ordinance, which raises the legal age to purchase tobacco products from 19 to 21, has been discussed by the governing body since the summer. It passed unanimously on first reading at the Oct. 13 meeting.

Sal Risalvato, executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience Store and Automotive Association (NJGCSA), which represents businesses in the industry, spoke out against the measure, citing a loss of revenue for convenience stores.

Risalvato, who was accompanied by two local convenience store owners, told the council that the ordinance would only harm small businesses.

"The ordinance that you're looking to adopt will do absolutely nothing to stop 19 and 20-year-olds from smoking," he said. "They will simply purchase their tobacco products in another town."

Risalvato asked the governing body to instead pass a resolution asking Trenton to pass a law raising the age statewide to 21.

He said that although tobacco products are no longer "high profit

products," customers that purchase them will often also buy other items such as a cup of coffee. He added that it would be "extremely uncomfortable" for store employees to refuse to sell cigarettes to members of the military who are under age 21.

"Personally, I don't see a conflict with thanking somebody for their service and not being able to sell them cigarettes," said Councilman Anthony DeRosa.

Councilman Larry Meyerson agreed and said that liquor stores are in a similar position.

"I understand your concern and I understand that it might be some revenue," he said. "But the damage that tobacco causes – tens of thousands of people suffer from cancer... You can't deny the connection." He added that perhaps if more municipalities pass the ordinance, it would persuade Trenton to change the law.

Similar ordinances have recently been adopted by several local municipalities, including Westwood and Teaneck.

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors of Smoke Free Policy (GASP), also addressed the mayor and council in support of the policy.

"We do believe it will save lives... And we do appreciate your interest in this particular policy to help young people not start to smoke," she said.

The ordinance will be on the agenda for second reading at the next regular meeting on Nov. 10.

<http://www.northjersey.com/news/health-news/borough-looks-to-curtail-smoking-with-ordinance-1.1443591>