

Measure before Paterson council seeks to raise cigarette buying age to 21

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A proposal before the city's governing body is seeking to raise the minimum buying age for tobacco, nicotine delivery products, and smoking devices to 21.

The measure will bar establishments from selling electronic smoking devices including e-cigarettes to patrons under 21 years of age, according to the propose ordinance. The minimum age to purchase tobacco in New Jersey is 19.

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (GASP), whose organization assisted the city to ban smoking in local parks, told council members the measure will deter young people from taking the first puff that often leads to a lifelong habit.

"90-percent of all people start to smoke before they turn age 21," said Blumenfeld citing a stastic from the U.S. Surgeon General. "So it's very important to reduce access the access of tobacco."

Blumenfeld said by limiting access, the city can hinder potential smokers from getting started. She cited a study that found suburban Needham, Massachusetts, the first city to adopt the "tobacco 21" policy, saw its smoking rate drop by 47-percent in five years.

The city's health director Donna Nelson-Ivy expressed her support for the measure and said mayor Jose "Joey" Torres is also behind the measure.

If enacted the measure would take away some freedoms from adults, said Julio Tavarez, 5th Ward councilman. He also wanted a detailed version of the 90-percent statistic showing the portion of that figure that falls under age 18.

Tavarez said he is not opposed to the measure, but said with smoking ban in restaurants, in offices, in parks, and elsewhere the cancer causing habit is on the wane. "Smoking is not a socially acceptable behavior," he said.

"I think it's a good first step," said Mohammed Akhtaruzzaman, 2nd Ward councilman. He worried about enforcement pointing to the many ordinances that exist, but are seldom enforced.

Ruby Cotton, 4th Ward councilwoman, took the discussion in a tangent, mentioning that the city has to figure out a way to address the sale of loose cigarettes that are often sold to teenagers by corner stores.

“Our city has a problem of selling looseys,” said Cotton. Selling loose cigarette is illegal; however, lack of enforcement has allowed it to become the norm at some establishments.

William McKoy, 3rd Ward councilman, said he spotted two businesses on Vreeland Avenue selling loose cigarettes openly. Tavares said the city should be focused on addressing the loose cigarette problem.

McKoy said cracking down on businesses selling loose cigarette will deter individuals from smoking, for a packet of cigarette is much perceptually much expensive as opposed to buying a loose cigarette few times a week.

The measure does not ban individuals under 21 years of age from smoking, but bars them from purchasing cigarettes.

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