

## **Christie's veto leaves smoking age in N.J. at 19**

By Susan K. Livio | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

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TRENTON — Young adults under 21 may continue buying tobacco and electronic cigarette products now that Gov. Chris Christie has rejected a bill that would have banned the sale of tobacco and vaping products to 19 and 20 year-olds.

The governor's decision Tuesday to veto the bill (A3254) is a win for food retailers and other convenience store operators who complained the loss of ancillary sales like coffee and sandwiches would have cut deep into their sales. It also benefits electronic cigarette sellers that argued they are a safer alternative to tobacco and a means to help people quit smoking.

The nonpartisan Office of Legislative Services estimated the state would have lost as much as \$16.2 million in sales tax by restricting sales to people 21 and over.

Sen. Richard Codey (D-Essex), a sponsor of the bill, said he would try again. "I am disappointed for the people of the state and the health of the state," Codey said. "There is strong momentum at the local level for this initiative with towns adopting it across the state and it was only right that we do this at the statewide level."

Fifteen municipalities have enacted ordinances raising the legal age of tobacco and e-cigarette sales from 19 to 21.

Health officers and advocates fought for the legislation, armed with science studies that said 90 percent of tobacco users begin before they turn 21.

"It's unthinkable that leadership doesn't support policy to eradicate the number one cause of disease and death – smoking," Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy. "Not only will tobacco age 21 saves lives, but will also save \$3 billion in NJ taxpayer dollars per year."

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