

## Update: Millburn advocates sounds off as Christie vetoes Tobacco 21 bill

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THE ITEM OF MILLBURN AND SHORT HILLS

Gov. Chris Christie has vetoed a bill that would have raised the legal age to buy tobacco and electronic smoking products in New Jersey. The bill - nicknamed Tobacco 21 - was sponsored by Sen. Richard J. Codey and Sen. Joseph F. Vitale, and would have raised the minimum smoking age from 19 to 21.

By not signing the bill this week, Christie exercised his right to a pocket veto. Bills that are pocket vetoed cannot be sent back to Legislature to be overridden. However, the bill was re-introduced as soon as it was vetoed, and it now heads back to the state Senate and the Assembly for consideration.

New Jersey towns can adopt their own Tobacco 21 ordinances. Fifteen towns had done so before the bill went to Christie's desk, and over 100 have similar ordinances nationwide.

Karen Blumenfeld Esq., executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (GASP) and a former township resident, says the bill would have helped stop young people from starting to smoke.

"What's sad is that this bill would have limited (the public's) access to a deadly product," she said.

According to a statement released by New Jersey Senate Democrats, studies have shown that the ages of 18 to 21 are a critical period for developing smoking habits. Many smokers move from casual or experimental smoking to more consistent use during this period.

Heather Jenquine is the coordinator of the Millburn Municipal Alliance Committee (MMAC), a group that promotes drug and alcohol-free lifestyles. MMAC supports restricting access to tobacco and harmful substances from young people.

"It's always been MMAC's position to postpone a child's first exposure to drugs, alcohol, and tobacco," Jenquine said. "Tobacco can cause so many adverse health affects to a young person's brain, which at that age (18-21) is developing rapidly. Putting toxic chemicals into your body can interrupt the growth process."

Tobacco use can stunt the growth of the brain's prefrontal cortex, which is in charge of decision making and rational thinking. Smoking cigarettes can impair your ability to make the decision to quit and can also cause other bodily impairments such as nerve damage, stress on the heart, and damaged DNA.

Jenquine and her colleagues in MMAC supported the bill's inclusion of e-cigarettes and vaping devices. Though young people are gradually moving away from smoking traditional cigarettes, e-cigs have become a new area for concern. While they do not contain tobacco, e-cigs contain nicotine and can be a gateway drug for young users.

"This (e-cigarettes) is a new technology that is dangerously marketed to young people with the slick advertising and kid-friendly flavors," Jenquine wrote in an email. "But the technology is very new and the affects of the chemicals found in e-cigarettes may be very harmful. Unfortunately, young people believe that e-cigarettes are harmless, so we will continue to educate students and parents on these harmful products as well."

Opponents say tobacco retailers would have suffered financially if the bill was enacted. However, Blumenfeld says the towns that have already adapted similar ordinances have not experienced significant issues.

"Fifteen New Jersey towns have done Tobacco 21 ordinances, and none have repealed it," she said. "New Jersey was the first state to raise the age of sale to 19, and retailers didn't close up shop when that was implemented."

The township has done its part to minimize smoking in public areas. Smoking has been banned on municipal property since 2014, including in parks, playgrounds, fields, and other recreational areas owned by the township.

"If I'm taking my family to the park for a picnic, the last thing I want is to see someone smoking and fall victim to secondhand smoke," Jenquine said. "It (the smoking ban) has made the parks a better environment for families."

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<http://www.northjersey.com/news/nj-state-news/update-millburn-advocates-sounds-off-as-christie-vetoes-tobacco-21-bill-1.1494746>