

Wayne Today (northjersey.com)

Gov vetoes smoking age bill, keeping it at 19

FEBRUARY 4, 2016 LAST UPDATED: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2016, 12:31 AM

BY DEBRA WINTERS

STAFF WRITER |

WAYNE TODAY

Email: wintersd@northjersey.com

WAYNE – The smoking age in New Jersey will not be increased to 21 after Gov. Christie vetoed the bill recently proposed, according to reports.

The legislation, A-3254, called for raising the legal age to purchase cigarettes and electronic cigarettes, also known as e-cigarettes, from 19 to 21. The bill also included cigars, cigarillos, and pipes.

According to the proposal retailers who were caught violating the law would face penalties up to \$25 for the first offense, \$500 for the second, and \$1,000 for each subsequent offense.

This moderate Democrat bill passed the Assembly committee 11-1 and the Senate last June. It then moved forward passing the full Assembly. Its next stop was the governor's desk, where it failed to get his support.

According to Tom Cantisano, chief sanitarian, Wayne Township used to receive funding to conduct tobacco age of sale business inspections via the State of New Jersey, but that has since been discontinued. Some tax dollars, he heard, have been reinstated to fund more inspections, and currently spot checks are done periodically without funding.

The bill itself would fall under the jurisdiction of a 2A law, meaning that local police have no territory in which to charge any underage person they would see with cigarettes, as it is a health related issue not a criminal one.

Additionally, any adult caught supplying cigarettes or tobacco products to a minor they may also face petty disorderedly person's offense.

However since the bill was vetoed, Cantisano said it's status quo in Wayne in terms of conducting checks.

"In order to enforce the age restrictions currently in place, the Wayne Health Department will continue to do spot checks of establishments that engage in the sale of tobacco and/or electronic vapor devices and the associated products," he said.

According to New Jersey Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (NJGASP), the rate of smoking is higher amongst teenagers in New Jersey versus adults. Certain forms of tobacco products are on the rise including hookah, and smokeless tobacco use. Hookah is a tobacco pipe gadget with a long, flexible tube which draws in the smoke via water that's placed in a bowl.

Robbin Gulino, coordinator of the Wayne Alliance for the Prevention of Substance Abuse, a grassroots education organization focused on bringing awareness to the community concerning alcohol and drugs,

was unhappy when she learned of the governor's veto.

"I was excited regarding the bill, figuring it would reduce the chances of getting cigarettes. Even though teenagers are resourceful and would look for other ways to get them, at least they would have a deterrent that would somehow reduce their options. I realize rules don't make addiction go away but every deterrent helps," she said. "Actually if the drinking age was the same as smoking it would be a lot easier."

Back in the 70s the legislature in New Jersey lowered the drinking age from 21 to 18, and then raised it to 19 in 1980. It was later raised back up to 21 after it was realized that less driving while intoxicated infractions were recorded.

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