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See what actions N.J. lawmakers are taking against smoking

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TRENTON — State lawmakers Monday took action on a number of bills aiming to cut down on smoking in New Jersey.

The state Senate's budget committee approved a bill that would raise the age people could buy cigarettes and smoking products in the Garden State from 19 to 21.

The legislation ([S359](#)) is another shot at an effort that Gov. [Chris Christie](#) vetoed in [January](#).

"The bottom line is: Tobacco is a killer, and every day more of our youth will continue to become addicted unless we do something about it," state Sen. Richard Codey (D-Essex), a co-sponsor, said.

At the same time, the Senate's health committee approved a measure ([S1731](#)) that would allow New Jersey municipalities to fine people up to \$200 for smoking in public. And the state Assembly's health committee approved three pieces of smoking-related legislation:

- The panel voted 10-1 in favor of [A1815](#), which would increase the tax on tobacco products to be on par with the tax rate imposed on cigarettes, and would also dedicate revenue to programs aiming to end smoking and tobacco use.
- The panel voted 8-3 in favor of [A2219](#), which would restore \$7.5 million in the state budget to the state health department for anti-tobacco programs.

"Having lost my father to lung cancer, I know first-hand the personal human and financial costs of smoking," Assemblyman Dan Benson (D-Mercer), a co-sponsor, said. "Restoring this funding can help people quit and prevent others, especially young people, from becoming addicted."

- The panel voted 9-0 in favor of [A3338](#), which would dedicate 5 percent of cigarette tax revenue to anti-smoking programs operated by the state health department that have

seen reduced funding in recent state budgets.

"We can either do nothing, or we can support anti-smoking programs that can help save the state on health care costs and prevent people from picking up this terrible habit," Assemblyman Joseph Lagana (D-Bergen), another sponsor, said.

Ethan Hasbrouck, director of government relations for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network for New Jersey, praised the moves Monday.

"It is gratifying to know that our legislators have been listening to their constituents and are aware that smokers who are fighting to quit smoking truly need this support," Hasbrouck said in a statement. "If passed and enacted these actions will not only save lives but will also save state health care dollars."

All of the bills still need to be passed by the full Senate and Assembly and then signed by Christie to become law.

http://www.nj.com/politics/index.ssf/2016/03/see_what_actions_nj_lawmakers_just_took_against_sm.html