

Lawmakers renew efforts to raise smoking age in New Jersey

By [David Matthau](#) February 22, 2016 11:35 PM

Last month, without an explanation, Gov. Chris Christie [vetoed a measure](#) that would have raised the age to buy tobacco products in New Jersey to 21.

Now that a new legislative session is underway, the Assembly Health Committee heard testimony on the same exact measure, and once again gave it the green light.

Testifying in favor of the bill was Karen Blumenfeld, the Executive Director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (New Jersey GASP). She told members of the panel that 16 Jersey towns have already raised the age to buy tobacco to 21 “and many more are in the process of doing it so there’s definitely that grassroots local momentum to have this happen.”

She said as she travels around the state, she’s “really witnessed first-hand an enthusiasm and a commitment by local policy-makers to try and help their town’s young people not to start smoking.”

Blumenfeld said policies that reduce teen and young adult’s access to tobacco “have been shown to lower smoking initiation rates, and it’s obvious that less tobacco use will translate into lower smoking related health-care costs.”

“In New Jersey we spend \$3 billion a year in smoking-related health care costs, so an initiative like this that has virtually no costs whatsoever expect for most likely putting up signs is something that could definitely help,” Blumenfeld said.

She said a study last year found 250,000 lives could be saved if the age to buy tobacco was raised to 21.

“That’s why the New Jersey Chapter of the American College of Physicians as well as their national organization and the American Medical Association also support this,” Blumenfeld said.

She added in this legislation, sales of [e-cigarettes](#), which continue to gain popularity among young people, would also be limited to people over the age of 21, which is very good, because a study shows they can be hazardous to the people who use them and those who breathe in the air around them.

She said the bottom line is “tobacco 21 initiatives, they do reduce smoking, they do improve health outcomes and they will save taxpayer dollars.”

Meanwhile the Assembly Tourism, Gaming and Arts Committee unanimously released a measure that would [ban smoking](#) at all New Jersey beaches and parks.

A year and a half ago, Christie vetoed the exact same measure, saying it wasn’t needed because many towns had already banned smoking in their parks, and these decisions should be left up to local leaders, not state ones.

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