

Letters to the editor: Tobacco 21, map amendment, new state rep

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Naperville needs Tobacco 21

I'd like to echo the wish of columnist Bill Mego in encouraging the Naperville City Council to make 21 the legal age to purchase all tobacco products. Known as Tobacco 21, this strategy will save lives and reduce healthcare costs associated with tobacco use.

In March of 2015, the Institute of Medicine released the results of a study that estimated that raising the tobacco-purchasing age to 21 would reduce smoking among 15- to 17 year olds by 25 percent, and 18- to 20 year olds by 15 percent. Many thousands of kids will live longer, healthier lives because they will never become addicted to nicotine.

Tobacco 21 would also cover the purchasing of e-cigarettes, a product with unknown long-term health effects. What we do know is that e-cigarettes have nicotine, harmful chemicals and toxins known to cause cancer and other ailments. Still, e-cigarette use among youth has tripled in just the past few years.

Some people suggest that if someone is "old enough to fight for his/her country," that's old enough to buy cigarettes. Because our soldiers need to be in top physical shape to do their jobs, the U.S. Department of Defense has already committed to making all military bases and posts worldwide tobacco-free by the year 2020. The U.S. military also supports tobacco 21 laws.

The costs of treating smoking-related illnesses are astronomical. Illinois currently spends \$5.49 billion, \$2 billion of that from the state's Medicaid program.

Support for raising the purchasing age to 21 is spreading nationwide. More than 170 cities nationwide, including Boston, Kansas City, New York City and Cleveland, have tobacco 21 laws. Chicago became a Tobacco 21 city on July 1.

Senate Bill 3011 would make Illinois the third state, after Hawaii and California, to adopt Tobacco 21. Naperville can help lead the way to a statewide Tobacco 21 law.

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