

Sayreville bans tobacco sales to people under 21

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SAYREVILLE — An ordinance banning the sale of tobacco products to people under the age of 21 was adopted by the Borough Council in a 4-2 vote at last week's meeting.

Sal Risalvato, executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience Store, and Automotive Association (NJGCA), urged the council not to pass the measure, claiming it would negatively impact local small businesses.

"The small businesses in Sayreville that sell tobacco ... would lose [a lot] of those sales simply because customers would cross the border into other towns [to buy cigarettes]."

The issue should instead be one for the state Legislature to decide, Risalvato said. The state Senate has passed a measure to raise the legal age to buy cigarettes, but the Assembly has yet to take action on it.

Mike Bowers, a Sayreville resident, supported the measure, stating that the impact on businesses would be minimal.

"Times have changed, the same as back in the '70s when we went through a change [with alcohol laws]," Bowers said. "Those people had the same complaints back then. Let's move on. Let's get this ordinance passed. It's an excellent ordinance."

Councilman David McGill, who presented the ordinance, voted in favor of it along with Councilman Ricci Melendez, Councilman Daniel Buchanan, and Council President Mary Novak.

"I think we need to move forward. I understand the small businesses' [position] ... but I think it's great of everyone who says 'yes' up here, because we really have to do it," Melendez said. "If it can save someone's life, even one child's life, then I'm all for it."

Councilwoman Lisa Eicher and Councilman Art Rittenhouse voted against the ordinance.

"[People] are just going to go to South River, South Amboy or Old Bridge to buy cigarettes," Eicher said. "If it was statewide, that would be a wonderful thing, but I'm not going to penalize just Sayreville businesses."

In a press release following the meeting, the NJGCA condemned the decision as a "feel-good measure, which will undoubtedly be unsuccessful in preventing any 19- or 20-year-olds from purchasing tobacco."

Sayreville is not the first New Jersey town to enact such a measure. Englewood, Bergen County, raised the legal age to buy tobacco products to 21 in August.

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