

## Legislature Mulls Raising Smoking Age To 21

By Taylor  
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A state representative is pushing to raise the smoking age from 18 to 21 this year in an effort to reduce underage smoking and lower the state's smoking rates overall.

Rep. George Till (D - Jericho), who proposed similar legislation last year, said increasing the age isn't just about preventing 18- to 20-year-olds from smoking.

"Every day in Vermont at least two youths become regular smokers," Till said to the House Human Services committee Tuesday. "When teens smoke regularly, three-quarters of those teens will become life-long smokers, and a third of those will die from smoking-related illness prematurely."

And Till said the age group that would be banned from smoking under his legislation is key in preventing teens from smoking.

"Even younger teens, ones that are under 18, are even more susceptible to [becoming addicted to nicotine], and the problem is that over 90 percent of their cigarettes come from individuals who are 18 to 21," he said. "So not only do you have the issue of the 18- to 21-year olds getting addicted and the problems that causes for them down the line, but you have the issue of the overflow then to the even younger kids, because that's who provides the cigarettes to the younger kids."

Till pointed to Needham, Mass., which raised its smoking age in 2005 and now has an adult smoking rate well below the Massachusetts state average.

"It obviously works," Till said. "All of the enforcement is already in place. It's just a question of changing the age."

Some members of the committee recalled complaints in the 1980s when Congress effectively pushed states to raise the drinking age to 21. They also noted that military officials might push back against the proposal.

The Human Services committee now must decide whether to advance the bill – Tuesday's hearing was simply Till's pitch to the committee to move forward.