

Tobacco ban is unanimous in Bogota

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BOGOTA - The Borough of Bogota has become the fourth municipality in New Jersey to ban the sale of tobacco products to people under the age of 21 after the unanimous passage of an ordinance at its Feb. 19 meeting.

Bogota joins nearby Englewood and Teaneck, as well as Sayreville in Middlesex County as the only municipalities in New Jersey with this ordinance on its books, along with New York City across the Hudson River. There is also legislation pending in the State Assembly that would enforce such a ban on a state-wide level.

Karen Blumenfeld, the Executive Director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (GASP), was present at the meeting to state her support in favor of the ordinance up for consideration.

"We are really pleased to see this initiative is happening in your community," said Blumenfeld during the public hearing. "It will be the fourth community in the state of New Jersey to do so: Englewood, Teaneck, Sayreville and hopefully Bogota."

Blumenfeld said her organization is currently working with other communities in Bergen County and all over New Jersey, advocating for local legislation to raise the age for purchasing tobacco.

"We're really pleased to see you're moving forward in this direction," Blumenfeld said, noting a statistic that says 90 percent of all people that smoke start before they turn 21 years of age. "We believe it will protect young people from starting to smoke."

There was no opposition from the public during the hearing and was adopted unanimously. The passage of the ordinance comes just three months after its neighbor to the north and east, Teaneck, approved a similar ban. The issue was under consideration in another neighboring city, Hackensack as of early January, but no further action has been taken.

Mayor Chris Kelemen praised his colleagues for being at the forefront of the issue after the vote was taken.

"I want to congratulate the council for passing this," said Kelemen. "It is an honor to be the fourth community in this state to adopt this."

In a follow-up email on Friday afternoon, Council President Jorge Nunez was also thankful to the members of the governing body for passing such an important ordinance in the borough.

"I commend Mayor Kelemen for leading the governing body toward the passage of this important initiative," he added.

Nunez has been a supporter of the measure since its introduction by the council on Jan. 15 as a way to hopefully prevent young residents in the borough from beginning to smoke at an early age.

"Increasing the age to purchase tobacco products may lead to a lifelong impact on young people's lives, by delaying and hopefully preventing them from the horrible effects of smoking such as emphysema or cancer," said Nunez, adding thanks to Blumenfeld for educating the council on such an important issue.

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