

Move to raise age for N.J. tobacco sales to 21 gains momentum again

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TRENTON -- A state Assembly panel voted Thursday to raise the age for tobacco product purchases in New Jersey from 19 to 21, a move that will cost the state nearly \$16 million in tax revenue.

The 7-3 vote of the Assembly Appropriations Committee sends the bill to the full Assembly -- the last stop before it gets to Gov. Chris Christie's desk. The Republican governor vetoed [the same measure](#) in January 2016, however.

[Christie's veto leaves smoking age in N.J. at 19](#)

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, or GASP, said the money the state would lose on tobacco tax revenue would eventually be made up by the reduction in tobacco-related illnesses like cancer and emphysema among state employees and Medicaid recipients.

The nonpartisan [Office of Legislative Services estimated](#) the state would lose \$4.5 million to \$12 million in the first year of implementation, and \$5.6 million to \$15.7 million the following year in tax revenue. The amount of losses would diminish by 4 percent a year as more people quit smoking.

Federal data suggest there are 440,000 19- and 20-year-old smokers in New Jersey. The taxes on a pack of cigarettes are \$2.70.

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