

Cancer advocates say tobacco bill is flawed, encourage lawmakers to vote no

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Steve Griffin, KSL

By
Emily Ashcraft, KSL

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SALT LAKE CITY — Although the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network is in favor of legislation raising the age for purchasing tobacco to 21, they used the annual Cancer Action Day to lobby against a bill that would do just that.

Why?

Because the network says it penalizes youth, it could keep other counties and cities from passing their own tobacco laws and it would be phased in over two years.

"We would love a bill we could support, so we are hopeful that he will make some changes," said the network's Brook Carlisle. "We just want to do it the right way the first time."

She said she would rather take the time to make [HB324](#) a good bill, even if it means the legislation takes another year. Carlisle said she is meeting Friday with the bill's sponsor, Rep. Steve Eliason, R-Sandy.

"With HB324 it's punishing the youth instead of punishing the tobacco industry who is irresponsibly targeting them, as well as the retailers who are selling to them," said Jen Tischler, grassroots manager for the network.

She said addiction should not be shamed or criminalized, especially for youth. If youth get in trouble while they are building who they are as a person, they could define themselves as thugs or criminals.

"This is not about smokers, this is about protecting youth from having access to these addictive materials that the tobacco industry is pushing," Tischler said.

According to Tischler, 800 youth in Utah each year become daily smokers, and vaping is especially a problem for youth because they have more access to it and it's easier to hide from parents.

Jordan Osborne was part of an anti-tobacco youth group in Utah County and helped change laws to make parks tobacco free. But when he was 18, a friend a few years older bought him a vape pen and he became a smoker. He still vapes and occasionally smokes cigarettes. He said he doesn't feel like he is addicted, but he gets aggravated when he hasn't smoked.

"If they had the smoking age at 21 back then it would have made it even harder for me to even get (tobacco)," Osborne said.

He said if he had never started using tobacco he would be a lot healthier and wouldn't have to have something to help him relax.

Cedar Hills and Lehi both passed ordinances in the last few weeks raising the age to buy tobacco to 21. But opponents to HB324 say language in the bill could stop other cities from making changes to local tobacco laws.