

Columbus could raise legal age to buy tobacco products



<https://www.10tv.com/article/columbus-could-raise-legal-age-buy-tobacco-products>

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PUBLISHED: 11/16/16 06:03 PM EST

UPDATED: 12/11/16 10:50 PM EST

COLUMBUS, Ohio

Columbus could be the next Ohio city to tighten smoking restrictions.

City council could decide to pass the [Tobacco 21 Initiative](#). The proposal would ban the sale of tobacco products to anyone under the age of 21.

The capital city would join four other cities in central Ohio that have already raised the legal limit from 18 to 21: New Albany, Grandview, Upper Arlington, and Bexley.

Some local tobacco shops are worried they could lose business.

The Joint tobacco shop said it sees regulars and welcomes all at its High Street location.

"My parents opened the store in 1997. I've been keeping it going for the last couple of years," Lacey Thompson said.

Thompson said sales are good at the shop right now, but it could all go up in smoke if the restrictions change.

"Because we are so close to campus and we get a lot of the students that come down. As a business owner, it's gonna hurt," Thompson said.

The Tobacco 21 Initiative could also change how tobacco businesses in Columbus operate.

"We know that raising the age actually reduces high school use by half," Dr. Rob Crane said.

Dr. Crane is the president of the Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation and involved in the Tobacco 21 movement. He said Columbus city officials have been

working with the city's health department and soon Columbus City Council could vote to ban the sale of tobacco products to anyone under the age of 21.

"The first that will happen, will be a long educational campaign. It will take 6 months or so to ramp up while we educate everybody and helping to get signage and training their clerks," Dr. Crane said.

Dr. Crane helped pass similar laws in central Ohio and across the country, but he said the Columbus proposal is different.

"[A] clerk [making \$8.75 an hour] got the fine, got the criminal record, nothing happened to the store. Now it's up to the store to train the clerk," Dr. Crane said.

If passed the Tobacco 21 Initiative would require shops to buy a \$150 retail license. Stores that sell to anyone underage could face a \$500 fine for a first offense and \$1,000 fines for repeat offenses.

Enforcement will come down on the business owner.

"Staff knows to ID with every purchase, especially if they look young," Thompson said.

Thompson said her staff is already prepared.

The first hearing on Tobacco 21 is scheduled for November 22. Columbus Public Health officials expect a council vote in December.

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