

News Release

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The Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition Responds

to

County Executive VETO of Tobacco-Free Pharmacies

Albany, NY -- Albany County was poised to take a groundbreaking step toward reducing youth smoking but was stopped in its tracks when County Executive Dan McCoy announced his veto of a measure to end tobacco sales in pharmacies earlier today. Local Law D would have ended the sale of tobacco in pharmacies and stores that contain a pharmacy, a policy that would have resulted in a 15% decrease in the number of tobacco retailers in Albany County and closed the door once and for all on licensed health care facilities profiting from the sale of a product that, when used as directed, is lethal.

The measure, introduced nearly two years ago by Albany County Legislator Tim Nichols, was passed 21-17 by the Albany County Legislature on August 11, 2014. Two public hearings have been held on the issue and both had overwhelming support from community members for tobacco-free pharmacies with the main opposition coming from the Grocery Store Alliance. The measure was also supported by more than fifty local, state and national organizations including local hospitals, health insurers, schools and businesses.

The veto from County Executive Dan McCoy came as a shock to Jessica Ramich, a local pharmacist and recent graduate of Albany School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. "I was counting on Albany County to do what most chain pharmacies have failed to do---end the hypocrisy of a licensed health care facility peddling the #1 cause of preventable death and disease. I celebrated when the county legislature passed the law. It never occurred to me it wouldn't get signed by the County Executive."

Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition Director, Judy Rightmyer, also expressed alarm and dismay at the veto. "For two years, we have been sharing evidence-based information and research directly with Albany County decision-makers on the benefits of ending the sale of tobacco in pharmacies and the information is compelling. Reducing the number of tobacco retailers has a direct effect on tobacco consumption. And removing tobacco from pharmacies reinforces the fact that tobacco and health don't mix, an important goal in denormalizing tobacco use. The majority of Albany County Legislators obviously agreed when they voted in favor of the law. Moreover, the majority of Albany county residents support ending the sale of tobacco in pharmacies."

Despite numerous attempts, the Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition was unsuccessful in scheduling a face-to-face meeting with the County Executive and met only briefly with his staff on two separate occasions. The County Executive was also absent from the public hearing on the law which his own office scheduled. Rightmyer says, "It concerns me that the veto was made in the absence of thorough consideration of available information. The reasons offered by the County Executive's Office as the basis for the veto are weak and because the public dialogue on the issue was overwhelmingly in favor, the decision smacks of back door politics. Sadly, the County Executive chose to put the interests of profits above health and missed a golden opportunity to help prevent the creation of a new generation of youth smokers."

Over one hundred Massachusetts municipalities have successfully passed and implemented local laws ending the sale of tobacco in pharmacies and several other New York State municipalities are currently considering similar legislation. Albany was poised to lead and be the first municipality in NYS to break the connection between tobacco and pharmacies, but the county executive's veto put an end to that distinction.

Within the next 45 days, the Albany County legislature has an opportunity to hold another vote on the measure in an attempt to override the veto. They would need 3/5th of the 39 legislators to vote in favor to override the veto.

About the Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition

The Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition is a community partnership of organizations and individuals working to decrease the impact of tobacco on our community, by promoting smoking cessation, preventing youth initiation and promoting smoke-free environments. Information on the Coalition can be obtained by going to www.SmokeFreeCapital.org.

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