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Daniel P. McCoy
County Executive

County Executive McCoy Signs Law Raising Age to 21 For Purchase of Tobacco Products in Albany County

Albany County Executive Daniel P. McCoy today signed into law a measure increasing the age to 21 for those seeking to purchase tobacco products in the county, including cigarettes, tobacco products, liquid nicotine or e-cigarettes. The county joins Suffolk and Chautauqua Counties as the only other counties in New York State that have raised the age for purchase amid growing evidence that shows that raising the age saves lives.

“This law will help get the message out that smoking kills and that we are working to enhance public health and help save lives,” said McCoy. “We all know that tobacco is the leading cause of preventable deaths in the United States and it is our responsibility to do what we can to help spread the message that smoking is a dead end.”

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that 80 percent of adult smokers first began smoking by age 18. It has also been shown that in localities where the minimum age for purchase is 21 years of age, there has been a decrease in youth smoking. In 2005 Needham, Massachusetts passed its law and smoking rates for high school students dropped from 12.9 percent to 6.7 percent.

Although the overall numbers of youths who smoke has declined from 2011-15, the data shows a significant increase in the use of e-cigarettes with 16 percent of high school students reported using e-cigarettes in the last 30 days. That is up from just .6 percent who used e-cigarettes in 2011.

“By signing this law, we are making a choice to help kids stay away from all tobacco products, not just cigarettes,” said McCoy. “There are kids who use multiple tobacco products and that is troubling to me. I am proud that once again Albany County is providing leadership on an issue that the state has yet to address.”

There has been concern raised about tobacco use in the military and whether the law is justified for those under 21 who serve our country. The Department of Defense has studied the issue and has banned tobacco use during basic training because of the impact on soldiers' physical fitness and endurance. Tobacco use has also been linked to higher rates of absenteeism and lost productivity among military personnel. Additionally, the DOD says that tobacco users are more likely to suffer injuries and experience delayed wound healing.

The law will take effect immediately after it is filed with the Secretary of State.

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