

# Governor Carney Announces Support for Legislation to Raise Tobacco Sales Age

## Senate Bill 25 would raise the legal age to purchase tobacco products from 18 to 21

**DOVER, Del.** – Surrounded by members of the General Assembly, advocates, students, and health care professionals, Governor John Carney on Tuesday announced his support for Senate Bill 25 – legislation that would raise the legal age for sales of tobacco and vape products from 18 to 21.

This legislation aims to protect youth in Delaware from the dangers of tobacco use and nicotine addiction. Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death and disability in Delaware and the United States, claiming 1,400 lives in Delaware each year, according to federal data. Treatment of tobacco-related illnesses costs Delaware \$532 million annually.

“We know the dangers of tobacco use, and anything we can do to prevent more Delawareans from starting to smoke is a step in the right direction,” said **Governor Carney**. “Raising the legal tobacco sales age from 18 to 21 will help reduce the number of young people who use tobacco products, and hopefully prevent more young people from trying tobacco products in the first place. Over time, we hope and expect this change will reduce the toll of tobacco-related illness. And it should curb the cost of treating those illnesses – costs that today are funded by all Delaware taxpayers, families, and businesses through higher health insurance rates and treatment programs. Thank you to members of the General Assembly who are committed to

this effort, and to our health care community for your support.”

“Everyone knows the costs of smoking: lung disease, cancer, higher insurance costs – and worst of all, a shorter life,” said **Senator Bryan Townsend**. “But not everyone is aware that after years of convincing more and more young people to never pick up the habit, tobacco products are now pushing their way back into our schools, reaching children as young as 12 with e-cigarette flavors like bubblegum and cotton candy. We need to explore every option we have to fight back against this trend and keep our kids healthy and smoke-free. SB 25 is a great start. Cities and states that have already enacted this policy are seeing underage smoking rates drop by a third or more. That’s more than just an impressive statistic – it’s lives saved, lengthened, and improved from middle school onward. We owe it to our constituents to take this kind of action and I look forward to working with my colleagues in the General Assembly to get this bill on the Governor’s desk as soon as possible.”

“Four out of five adult smokers became addicted, daily smokers before age 21. Raising the age to buy tobacco products would mean that fewer adults would develop a lifelong habit that carries life-shortening consequences,” said **Representative Melissa Minor-Brown**, the lead House sponsor. “Tobacco use costs Delaware more than \$500 million each year in direct medical-related costs, but it costs families much more in terms of loves ones taken far too soon.”

Ninety-five percent of adults who smoke started before the age of 21, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The years of young adulthood between the ages of 18 and 21 are considered a critical period when many smokers transition from experimental smoking to regular, daily use of tobacco products. Reducing the availability of tobacco products for individuals in this age range should also decrease the number of high school-age Delawareans exposed to

tobacco products, and reduce the number adult smokers in Delaware over time.

Tobacco use also has a significant economic impact on health care spending in Delaware. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that tobacco use costs Delaware \$532 million each year in direct medical-related costs. Medicaid funds for \$95 million of those costs annually. An estimated 17,000 Delaware youth who are alive now, will die prematurely in the future from a smoking-related illness, according to federal data.

“The financial savings in health care spending that will result from this change will certainly be significant,” said **Dr. Kara Odom Walker, Secretary of the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services**. “But those savings pale in comparison to the true benefits of this legislation – improved quality of life for all Delawareans and the chance to keep more people from starting a habit that will shorten their lives by 10 years, according to the CDC.”

“Tobacco products, including the liquid cartridges used in e-cigarettes and vaping pens, contain highly addictive nicotine and other chemicals known to cause cancer, heart disease, and respiratory diseases such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death and disability in our state,” said **Dr. Karyl Rattay, Director of the Division of Public Health**. “It is our duty to protect today’s youth and young adults from tobacco, including e-cigarettes, and vaping initiation because their brains are more susceptible to the effects of nicotine. Nicotine can disrupt the formation of brain circuits that control attention, learning, and susceptibility to addiction, an issue with which Delaware already struggles.”

“A key component of Tobacco 21 legislation is the inclusion of e-cigarettes,” said **Deb Brown, Chief Mission Officer of the American Lung Association**. “As stated in our ‘State of Tobacco

Control' report, the need for Delaware to take action to protect youth from tobacco is more urgent than ever, with youth e-cigarette use reaching epidemic levels due to a 78 percent increase in high school e-cigarette use from 2017 to 2018. The Lung Association is proud to stand with Governor Carney and Senator Townsend on this lifesaving legislation and our hope is that other state leaders step up and stand with us to save our next generation from a lifetime of tobacco addiction."

"This measure is very important for the health of young adults in our state," said **Senator Anthony Delcollo**. "I am proud to stand together for this bipartisan effort to limit the damaging effects of nicotine addiction and cancer in Delaware."

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*Rewatch the press conference [here](#).*