SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 14, 2014

SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED!
LEGAL AGE TO PURCHASE TOBACCO PRODUCTS AND E-CIGARETTE RAISED TO 21

Huntington, NY – Suffolk County Legislator William R. Spencer (D-Huntington) was joined by County Executive Steve Bellone and supporters to celebrate the historic passage of IR 1039-2014, a Local Law to Raise the Legal Age for the Sale of Tobacco Products in Suffolk County to 21 years of age. The bill, sponsored by Legislator Spencer, was signed into law by County Executive Bellone today. Suffolk County is the first county in the nation to pass such a stringent, comprehensive resolution which prohibits the sale of all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, liquid nicotine, rolling papers, and pipes to individuals under the age of 21. The law will take effect on January 1, 2015 and is another important policy the County has adopted to protect public health and ease the heavy burden tobacco products place on society.

“This issue is complicated but everyone agrees that smoking is always hazardous to your health. There is no question that in the 50 years since the Surgeon General issued his first warning about tobacco we have proven, using sound and repetitive science, that the chemicals in these products are highly addictive and deadly. Keeping tobacco products, and the unregulated e-cigarette merchandise, out of the hands of our teenagers will undoubtedly save lives,” stated Legislator Spencer. “This is a great day for Suffolk County residents.”

“Rarely do you get the opportunity to sign legislation that will literally save lives,” stated County Executive Bellone. “The public health and safety impacts of this bill are undeniable. I am excited that Suffolk County is pioneering these restrictions for the health of our young people. I thank Legislator Spencer for championing this bill and applaud the Suffolk County Legislature for its passing. I look forward to signing this legislation into law today.”

At the press conference, Legislator Spencer, County Executive Steve Bellone and Suffolk County Health Commissioner James Tomarken, took the opportunity to remind residents and business owners about the restrictions that have been placed on e-cigarettes as well. E-Cigarettes have gained substantial popularity over the years as smoking cessation devices. Some smokers believe they are a safe alternative to regular tobacco cigarettes. Recent news articles suggest however that there are harmful effects of using these unregulated products, which often have higher levels of nicotine and chemicals

MORE – MORE – MORE
than traditional cigarettes. The Centers for Disease Control reports a steady increase in Poison Center calls about liquid nicotine and other e-cigarette products. Due to the fact that e-cigarettes are marketed as smoking cessation devices, there is confusion regarding where and when they are allowed to be used. In 2009, the Suffolk County Legislature passed a law that prohibited the use of e-cigarettes and like products in public places where other forms of smoking are traditionally disallowed, such as restaurants and bars, county parks and beaches, hospitals, office buildings, and other public indoor places. Spencer’s law took it a step further by raising the purchasing age for e-cigarettes from 19 to 21.

“Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S.,” said Commissioner Tomarken, MD, MPH, MBA, MSW. “Given that 85 percent of adults who smoke started when they were 21 or younger, it makes sense to ban sales of tobacco to those under 21. This is in the best interest of public health.”

“It was astounding me to see the connection between youth smoking and lifelong nicotine addiction. By raising the legal age to purchase cigarettes, it is my hope that we can reduce the amount of residents who battle with smoking addiction before it’s too late,” stated Suffolk County Legislature Majority Leader Rob Calarco.

“Ninety percent of cigarettes purchased for underage smokers are bought by 18 to 20 year olds,” said Suffolk Legislator Kara Hahn. “Raising the minimum age to 21 will save lives by putting legal purchases outside the social circle of most high school students and thereby reducing the supply available. If you reduce the supply, you reduce the use.”

“This legislation will prevent young people from becoming addicted at an early age, increasing their future quality of life and saving millions in health care costs for us all,” stated Suffolk Legislator Al Krupski.

“Today is an important day in Suffolk County because we have come together in a movement to protect our young from the dangers of smoking,” stated Suffolk Legislator Monica Martinez. “I applaud Legislator Spencer for sponsoring this bill and support his efforts in caring for our youth.”

“It is my pleasure to thank you, Dr. Spencer, and County Executive Bellone and the Suffolk Legislature for being one of the trailblazers in the Smoking 21 bill. There is no question in my mind that it will prevent diseases and prevent egregious amounts of money being spent by taxpayers funding health care in the future by restricting the sale of tobacco products to children,” stated Nassau County Legislator Judy Jacobs. “Unfortunately, we all know that by the time a child reaches the age that he would be able to make well-formed decisions about tobacco, he/she is already addicted. This law will be a life saver and protect the health, safety and welfare of the residents we are elected to represent. I am very hopeful that Nassau County will do the same once all the statistics are provided to the Legislators. It makes absolutely no sense for Nassau to stand alone, between Suffolk and the City. I would like to believe that we all care, equally, about the health of our constituents.”

“I applaud what Suffolk is doing in an effort to make our communities healthier and safer. We should follow suit in Nassau County so we don’t become the place where young people from Suffolk and New York City flock to purchase cigarettes to start a deadly, lifelong habit,” said Nassau Legislator Carrie Solages.

Spencer’s law, which will take effect in 2015, will be instrumental in helping to reduce smoking rates among teens, as it has been shown in the past that legal purchasers between the ages of 18 and 20 are
a significant source of cigarettes for adolescents 17 and younger. In combination with the fact that individuals are three times less likely to pick-up the habit if they haven’t smoked by 18, and 20 times less likely to pick up the habit if they haven’t begun smoking by 21. This law will successfully remove most purchasers from the social circles of high school students, thus reducing the chances that an individual will try cigarettes or have the supply of cigarettes to become addicted. Coupling tobacco educational campaigns along with a law that raises the tobacco purchasing age has proven to be successful, most notably in Needham, Massachusetts. When the purchasing age was raised to 21 there in 2005, smoking rates among youth, as well as cancer rates fell by nearly half.

Once instituted, the law will have a beneficial fiscal impact for the county as well. A report issued by the non-partisan Budget Review Office of the Legislature delved in to this issue further, and concluded that by raising the tobacco purchasing age to 21, will save the County $54 million dollars per year primarily in health-related costs. The accumulated savings were estimated to be $2.9 billion dollars in savings over the next 50 years.

"Legislator Spencer has been a strong leader and an enthusiastic advocate for improving the health status of Suffolk County residents," stated Ronald Gaudreault, member of the Board of Health. "He has supported sensible legislation that improves the quality of life for the people of this County----a great place to live!"

"Once again, Legislator Dr. William Spencer has remained faithful to his sworn promises and commitment to his constituents, community, and his medical profession by sponsoring this protective measure for our children. By raising the legal age for purchasing tobacco products to 21, Dr. Spencer's bill embraces the full weight of science, medicine, and law. Children must not be left abandoned and exposed to the predatory practices of the tobacco industry. Understanding the risks of early addiction to nicotine, the potential for death or myriad severe illnesses, along with the extreme expense of future health care, this law will help prevent a new generation of our young from becoming addicted," stated Patricia Bishop-Kelly.

“Tobacco products are the only merchandise that we sell that, at point of sale, are 100% toxic. There is no medicinal reason to smoke,” asserted Legislator Spencer. “The tide is turning and as we focus on trying to keep our constituency healthy, this is a clear public health policy that will do just that while saving millions of taxpayer dollars.”

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