Despite NJ Governor’s Veto, other States to Consider Bills to Raise Smoking Age to 21

New Jersey Gov. Christie declined to sign a bill to raise the legal age for purchase of traditional cigarettes and e-cigarettes to 21 years. Christie’s pocket veto came on Jan. 19, 2016, the last day for executive action on bills adopted during the 2015 legislative session. Despite Christie’s action, other states are considering similar bills to prohibit the purchase of traditional tobacco and e-cigarettes by youth under the age of 21.

The governor’s decision was called a win for food retailers and convenience store operators by NJ.com. These businesses said they would have lost sales of coffee and sandwiches. The nonpartisan Office of Legislative Services had estimated the bill would have cost the state $16.2 million in lost sales taxes. Electronic cigarette businesses had argued that their products are a safer alternative to traditional tobacco cigarettes and a means to help people quit smoking.

On January 1, 2016, Hawaii became the first state to raise the smoking age to 21.

As state legislatures begin their 2016 sessions, bills to raise the smoking age to 21 have been introduced in Pennsylvania and in West Virginia.

West Virginia Senator Stollings, who introduced Senate Bill 248 on January 15, said in a press release, that his state has the most adult smokers per capita in the nation, in addition to the 1,800 young people that begin to smoke each year. Approximately 20 percent of West Virginia high school students use a form of tobacco. Tobacco use costs the state of West Virginia $1 billion, according to Sen. Stollings, a burden of roughly $1,219 per household.

“I look to decrease the number of young smokers in the state, which, in turn, will reduce the state’s overall smoking population and the state’s health care spending,” said Sen. Stolling, who is also a practicing physician.