

# **Bucks County Courier Times**

## **Assembly panel advances smoking ban for beaches and parks**

**By David Levinsky Staff writer, February 21, 2014**

TRENTON — New Jersey lawmakers have advanced a bill banning smoking at all state and municipal beaches and parks.

Smoking is already prohibited inside most public areas and workplaces. The bill advanced Thursday by the Assembly Tourism and Gaming Committee would extend the ban to public beaches and parks but not the parking lots near those destinations.

Violators would be fined \$250 for the first offense, \$500 for the second, and \$1,000 for third and subsequent offenses.

Supporters said the measure was intended to reduce public exposure to secondhand smoke as well as cut down on litter and boost fire safety.

“When you look at our public beaches and public parks, we certainly do not want people to experience secondhand smoke, and we certainly do not want to increase the litter from cigarette butts,” said the bill’s sponsor, Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle, D-37th of Englewood.

“This enhances our beaches in New Jersey and, I think, promotes more tourism across the state.” Other supporters noted that more than 100 towns and counties have already banned or restricted smoking in their parks and beaches. But they said a statewide ban would provide uniformity.

“It is key that there be uniformity,” said Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy. “We know there is no safe level of secondhand smoke at all. And it has been proven that secondhand smoke outdoors does affect people.”

In Burlington County, Beverly, Bordentown Township, Burlington Township, Delran, Edgewater Park, Evesham, Mansfield, Mount Holly and Palmyra have established smoking bans. Willingboro is considering a ban.

Also, the county’s parks are now smoke- and tobacco-free.

Blumenfeld and other anti-smoking advocates also said the statewide ban would help prevent children from taking up the unhealthy habit and would encourage smokers to quit.

“Smoke-free policies change the social norm and encourage smokers to quit,” said Ethan Hasbrouck, director of government relations for the American Cancer Society’s Cancer Action Network.

Banning smoking would also cut down on litter at beaches and parks, supporters said. Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club, said one volunteer picked up more than 500 cigarette butts during one of the club’s recent beach cleanups.

“We pick up tens of thousands of cigarette butts,” he said. “They’re easily one of the three

biggest sources of pollution on our beaches.”

No one spoke in opposition to the bill during Thursday’s hearing, but representatives from smokers’ rights groups have said claims about the dangers posed by secondhand smoke in outdoor environments are dubious.

“While harm from another’s cigarette smoke indoors remains debatable, there is zero valid scientific evidence that someone smoking outdoors is harmful to anyone,” Audrey Silk, director of Citizens Lobbying Against Smoker Harassment, said last March in an interview.

The idea of a statewide smoking ban at beaches and parks is not new. Legislation was first introduced in the Legislature by state Sen. Loretta Weinberg, D-37th of Teaneck, and former state Sen. Barbara Buono in 2009.

Eighth District Republican Sen. Dawn Marie Addiego and Assemblyman Chris Brown authored similar legislation last year to ban smoking in all state parks, beaches, wildlife management areas and properties acquired or developed with state funds.

Thursday marked the first time any of the bills had advanced from a legislative committee. The Tourism and Gaming Committee voted to release the measure and send it to the full Assembly for a floor vote.

[http://www.buckscountycouriertimes.com/news/local/assembly-panel-advances-smoking-ban-for-beaches-and-parks/article\\_29d31256-d75b-5fa1-8999-f2c7cddcf3f6.html](http://www.buckscountycouriertimes.com/news/local/assembly-panel-advances-smoking-ban-for-beaches-and-parks/article_29d31256-d75b-5fa1-8999-f2c7cddcf3f6.html)