

Nicotine Free Generation - - Six City Tobacco Initiative

September 19, 2024

Tobacco use is still the leading cause of preventable death in the US. Every year almost half a million Americans die prematurely of smoking related disease. Billions of dollars are spent on smoking related illnesses. So, what have we done about it?

- . The Federal government banned flavored cigarettes in 2009. And the US has significant restrictions on advertising.

- . We're waiting for the White House to sign an FDA ban on menthol cigarettes.

Meanwhile local Boards of Health have made a huge difference.

- . Local boards led the campaign for a smoke-free workplace law two decades ago, against extreme pushback, especially from restaurants and bars. They had the conviction and the courage to adopt this progressive policy. And now we can't imagine going into a restaurant, theater or bar, say nothing about a hospital or a school; or riding on a subway, bus, train or plane where someone is smoking.

- . Local Boards, including this one, adopted many tobacco regulations over the years all of which were designed to reduce smoking and youth access to tobacco. Local Boards were early adopters of T-21, pharmacy ban, flavor restriction, cigar minimum price, permit cap, and proximity ban, as well as a ban on smoking bars. Some of these policies have since made their way into state law.

So what has all this legislation, regulation, and policy change accomplished? It has moved the needle - a bit. However, people still smoke, millions are still affected by smoking; and vaping in our schools remains a serious issue.

Now may be the time for a strategy that will start us on a path to end nicotine addiction.

In 2020 the Town of Brookline passed a by-law that made it illegal for Brookline retailers to sell tobacco to anyone born after 1/1/2000.

It's actually pretty simple. As of 1/1/2020, anyone purchasing a tobacco product has to be born before 1/1/2000. Brookline retailers have to remember one date, whereas now the Minimum Legal Sales Age changes every single day.

No one who is already 21 loses his or her "privilege" to purchase tobacco products. This policy only affects only those who do not now and have never been able to legally buy nicotine products.

This policy starts to move us towards the end of tobacco use and addiction which has harmed millions and cost billions for decades. There is no reason to allow this public health crisis to continue in order for the tobacco industry to grow their profits.

In summary:

- . Retailers have a long time to get used to lower tobacco sales. Each year just one year's worth of potential new buyers will not be able to legally buy tobacco products.

So, lots of lead time, no one gets a "privilege" taken away, it's easy to administer, and we finally move towards a nicotine free generation.

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court unanimously ruled in favor of Brookline's right to regulate tobacco sales.

Stoneham and Wakefield adopted NFG in March and just last week the Melrose Board of Health also voted to adopt NFG. All are effective 1/1/2025.

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