

# Lawmakers Again Debate Age to Purchase Tobacco

By David Propper

Another legislative health committee meeting last week didn't seem to resolve whether enough lawmakers would support increasing the age to purchase tobacco products in Putnam County, which has been an ongoing discussion the past several months.

This month, legislators heard from Jim Calvin, who is the president of the New York Association of Convenience Stores, which opposes raising the proposed purchasing age to 21 years. They also got input from health commissioner Dr. Michael Nesheiwat and Joe DeMarzo, deputy commissioner of social services, whom both support the proposal. Currently, you must be 18 to buy tobacco products in Putnam.

Calvin urged legislators to look at raising the age to purchase tobacco from not just a public health aspect, but also a small business issue. Retailers that are licensed to sell tobacco would be adversely affected by the decision to increase the age, he said.

About 100 retailers in Putnam currently sell tobacco products, he said. Undercover minors are sent into convenience stores by the county health department to ensure businesses aren't selling tobacco to minors, Calvin said, noting there is a 97 percent compliance rate in the county.

The convenience store association

opposes a higher tobacco purchase age because the interest group doesn't believe it'll work. Calvin said younger teens don't get tobacco products from stores, but from older relatives and acquaintances. If the age is raised to 21, Calvin said those older teenagers would be resourceful enough to find a way to get tobacco products, especially because they have their own mode of transportation in most cases.

He noted a neighboring county—Dutchess—doesn't have a law in place to raise the age to 21, though Westchester implemented the law. Minors also can get tobacco products from sellers that aren't licensed, he said.

"The barrier you're trying to place between the tobacco and the younger kids is not a brick wall," Calvin said. "It's Swiss cheese."

Legislator Barbara Scuccimarra, who is spearheading the proposal, shot back no one believes raising the age will totally eliminate smoking and tobacco use, but she does believe it would reduce smoking among younger people. She claimed only 2 percent of tobacco sales would be affected if the law is implemented.

Calvin countered by arguing customers that come in to buy tobacco might also purchase other non-tobacco items that go toward that convenience store's bottom line.

"Every sale is important," Calvin said, noting labor costs are going up statewide.

DeMarzo spoke in favor of bumping the age up to 21. He said many people that suffer from a serious addiction start with alcohol or tobacco at a young age. DeMarzo added 84 percent of people that are in addiction services smoke cigarettes, stating there is a correlation between tobacco and other addictive products.

The age to purchase vaping products should also be raised to 21, DeMarzo said.

Nesheiwat also said he supports raising the age to buy tobacco, arguing businesses losing a small amount of profit is "insignificant." He argued the medical bills decades later from people that started smoking at a young age would be astronomical. When Putnam banned smoking in restaurant many years ago, those eateries were able to move on without much of a problem, he pointed out.

"I think we need to be open minded about it," Nesheiwat said.

Legislator Bill Gouldman, who is on the fence about the proposal, questioned how the new possible law would be enforced. When Scuccimarra said the health department could handle it, Gouldman replied, "Oh, we're going to have a smoking police in Putnam County?"

Legislator Carl Albano said while he

doesn't like passing new laws and feels bad for any business hurt, he thinks stopping young people from smoking should be the top concern.

"You've got to send a message to these kids that just can't seem to make good decisions on their own," Albano said.

Legislature Chairman Joe Castellano had mixed feelings about approving the legislation because he believes it's a state or federal issue. He added an 18-year-old could go off to war and at some point adults need to make decisions on their own.

"I don't think anyone should smoke," he said. "But I do think it's hurting these local convenience stores."

Legislator Ginny Nacerino said by implementing this age increase, it would send a message that young adults can't make decisions on his or her own. Generally, Nacerino said she doesn't like restricting products, but instead wants further awareness and education.

Scuccimarra said the legislation is still not ready to go to a full meeting for a vote. She said she wants to work with the county attorney's office to put something together that would include tobacco and vaping products.

"We're not saying it's going to solve the whole problem," Scuccimarra said. "It's going to help with the problem."



## OUR BUS IS YOUR BEST BET.

\$30  
Round Trip Bus Fare

### \$40 BONUS PACKAGE VALUE!

\$15 Meal/Retail Coupon  
One \$10 Bet Coupon & One \$15 Free Bet

### Why Drive?

For Information Call:  
JTR Transportation  
1.800.433.7444  
ext. 103

[www.SeeYouOnTheBus.com](http://www.SeeYouOnTheBus.com)

### Servicing

Hyde Park  
Poughkeepsie  
Fishkill  
Brewster/Carmel

Bonus packages are issued to individuals 21 years of age or older. To receive a casino bonus package, passengers must have a Momentum card or be able to sign up for a Momentum card on day of travel. Proper identification required. Please visit the Bus Marketing Window for official rules. Offer subject to change without notice. mohegansun.com



Check Out Hot Summer Fun at Mohegan Sun!  
[mohegansun.com/HSF](http://mohegansun.com/HSF)

American Cuisine
Mediterranean Cuisine

## WELCOME TO OLYMPIC FAMILY DINER

**EARLY BIRD SPECIALS**  
SERVED ALL DAY  
FROM **\$12.99**

**GOURMET SALAD SPECIALS**  
FROM **\$12.99**

**TRY OUR NEW OLYMPIC SEAFOOD COMBINATIONS!**  
**\$22.99**

**BREAKFAST SPECIALS COMPLETE**  
Includes 2 Eggs, Hot Coffee & Juice  
**\$6.99**

**PASTAS & SAUTEES MADE TO ORDER**  
7 AM to 11 AM  
**\$12.99**

**LUNCH SPECIALS COMPLETE**  
(includes Soup & Dessert)  
**\$11.99**

**FRESH BROILED SEAFOOD DINNERS**  
WITH SOUP OR SALAD, POTATO & VEGETABLE  
**\$16.99**

**STEAKS & CHOPS WITH SOUP OR SALAD, POTATO & VEGETABLE**  
**\$17.99**

**1 1/2 LB. LOBSTER**  
Stuffed Broiled Lobster with soup or salad, potato  
**THIS MONTH'S SPECIAL \$21.99**

**Senior Citizen Specials starting at \$13.99, 2pm to 5pm**  
**Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner Specials Every Day!**

**Room available for any occasion!**

**Homemade Dinners, Pastas and Sautees Made to order**



## OLYMPIC DINER

Route 6, Mahopac 845-628-0876 • [www.olympic-diner.com](http://www.olympic-diner.com)