



## SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Oregon Senate votes to raise legal tobacco age to 21**

*SB 754 is designed to curb youth smoking statewide*

SALEM – The Oregon Senate passed bipartisan legislation today designed to prevent young people from becoming addicted to tobacco by raising the legal age to 21 for tobacco and e-cigarette use.

Senate Bill 754, the Tobacco 21 bill, passed the Senate by a 19-8 vote. Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward (D-NW Portland and Beaverton) is a chief sponsor of the bill and worked with a coalition that included Oregon Health & Science University Knight Cancer Institute Director Dr. Brian Druker and the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network.

“I ran for office to make Oregon the healthiest state in the nation, and I am proud to stand with my colleagues in passing SB 754 out of the Senate today, with bipartisan support,” Steiner Hayward said. “This bill will decrease youth smoking rates, decrease tobacco-related diseases and health care costs, and it will improve public health. This is good policy for Oregonians.”

The bill would raise the legal age of sale and consumption for all tobacco and inhalant delivery system products to 21. It’s part of a national Tobacco 21 movement with a goal of persuading state and local governments to adopt the new age parameter. Two other states have passed statewide laws on the issue and nearly 200 local governments across the country have adopted an older minimum age, including Oregon’s own Lane County just last week.

“This is a common-sense way to keep these highly addictive products out of the hands of teenagers,” said Sen. James Manning (D-Eugene), who was a chief sponsor of the bill. “If we can prevent anyone from taking up this kind of habit, we can save lives and create a healthier state.”

Tobacco use claims the lives of more than 5,500 Oregonians every year. According to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, roughly 1,800 Oregon teens younger than 18 become new daily smokers each year. Research from the United States Surgeon General indicates children and teens may be especially sensitive to nicotine, making it easier for them to become addicted, and even at lower levels of consumption than adults. The younger smokers are when they start, the more likely they are to become addicted.

“Raising the tobacco sales age is a broadly supported issue. In fact, 64 percent of Oregonians say they favor raising the age for tobacco sales to 21 as part of the solution to addressing Oregon’s number one cause of preventable death,” said Christopher Friend, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network Oregon government relations director. “The Legislature has a tool at their fingertips that promises to save lives and money, and has wide support across party lines.”

Raising the tobacco sales age is predicted to have the biggest impact on smoking rates among 15- to 17-year-olds. Research shows that younger teens in high school often turn to their 18-year-old classmates as sources for tobacco products. If the minimum age is 21, it will become much more difficult for teenagers to obtain tobacco and, subsequently, develop nicotine addictions.

“If you can delay the start of a tobacco habit by even a few years, fewer young people will become addicted to tobacco, which means fewer cancer patients in the future,” Dr. Druker said. “The bottom line is that Tobacco 21 will save the lives of Oregonians.”

Senate Bill 754 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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