

Alaska State Legislature

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Representative Gary Knopp

Sponsor Statement

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House Bill 174

HB 174 will change Alaska Statute to match recently implemented Federal guidelines for the sale of tobacco products. This bill will raise the legal age of tobacco use in Alaska to 21 and in doing so end discrepancies in both statute and enforcement between federal and state tobacco use laws.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, smoking costs the State of Alaska \$575,000,000.00 in direct medical expenditures and kills an estimated 700 persons annually. The deaths of Alaskans to smoking further costs the state \$261,000,000.00 yearly in lost productivity.

According to the Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey 12% of male youths and 9% of female youths use tobacco products. This use of tobacco products becomes more prevalent the higher the grade level the student is in; rising from 6% in 9th grade to 16% in 12th grade. The doubling of the number of youth tobacco users between their freshman and senior years of high school highlights how access to tobacco products leads to a rise in tobacco use. By raising the legal age of tobacco use to the age of 21 from the age of 19 we will be further removing access to tobacco products from Alaskan youth by removing access within their own peer groups.

The Alaska Department of Health and Human Services cites that in 2017 only 11% of Alaskan high school students who used tobacco products purchased those products for themselves. That leaves 89% of Alaskan high school students who obtain tobacco products by other means, including, borrowing them from a peer or giving a peer over the legal age money to purchase tobacco products on their behalf.

It is important to match Alaskan smoking statutes with federal guidelines in order to allow State law enforcement personnel to prevent and enforce sales to under age consumers.

It is the intent of this bill to not only match Alaska Statute with Federal guidelines, but to combat tobacco use among Alaskan children.