

Ban on vaping proposed

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A new bill introduced by Speaker Benjamin Cruz wants to expand the ban on smoking in public places to also prohibit the use of electronic smoking devices in the same locations.

"Vaping is a choice. Breathing isn't," said Cruz, who introduced Bill 198-34 yesterday. "No one who visits a public place should be forced to inhale potentially dangerous chemicals as the price of admission."

The Natasha Protection Act was initially signed into law in December 2005 and was amended through Public Law 33-121 on Feb. 4, 2016. The amended statute now prohibits smoking in places such as restaurants and bars, outdoor recreation spaces, elevators, public restrooms, transit stops, service lines and within 20 feet of entrances to business and government establishments and other public areas.

Smoking, as currently defined by the statute, means "inhaling, exhaling, or burning any lighted cigar, cigarette, pipe, weed, plant, tobacco product or related substance." Electronic smoking devices are not included on the list.

Bill No. 198-34 seeks to amend the Natasha Act's current definition of smoking to include "the use of an electronic smoking device" or ESD.

The speaker's legislation also would establish a definition of ESDs to include "any electronic product that can be used to aerosolize and/or deliver nicotine or other substances to the person inhaling from the device."

These devices include "electronic cigarette, electronic cigar, electronic cigarillo, electronic pipe, hookah pipe, or hookah pen, and any cartridge or other component of the device or related product, whether or not sold separately," the legislation states.

Guam numbers

The speaker's office cited Dr. Annette M. David, a senior partner for health consulting services on Guam, who noted a higher rate of e-cigarette use among Guam's youth when compared with the United States.

According to David, 32 percent of Guam's high school students vape and 25 percent of Guam's middle schoolers have used an e-cigarette in the last 30 days.

"Vaping is the next frontier for addiction. Although vape manufacturers advertise e-cigarettes and other electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) as safe alternatives to smoking, the data indicates that these products come with their own risks; while they may be less harmful than smoking, they are not safe. Clearly, proposing to extend our current tobacco-control policies to include electronic cigarettes and other (electronic smoking devices) is both appropriate and necessary to stave off a future of addiction for our island community," David said.

Program funding

Bill 198-34 also carves out \$100,000 from unappropriated Healthy Future Fund revenues in the prior fiscal year for the use of the prevention and training branch of the Guam Behavioral Health and Wellness Center. The funding will support prevention and cessation programs addressing electronic smoking devices and tobacco use.

According to the speaker's office, as of October, 600 municipalities and 15 U.S. states have included electronic smoking devices in their smoke-free policies and laws.

"It took tobacco companies decades to fully disclose the danger of secondhand smoke. If adults over 21 choose to vape, I can respect that choice, but I'm not going to ask other members of the public to gamble with their health and that of their families," Cruz said.