

The Lakewood Scoop

Vainieri Huttle & Sokolich Kick Off Public Health Drive to Ban Smoking at Parks & Beaches

The Lakewood Scoop Staff, April 29, 2014

Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle and Fort Lee Mayor Mark Sokolich on Friday kicked off a drive to encourage more towns to restrict smoking at public parks and beaches now that the weather is warming up and more people are enjoying the outdoors.

“After the awful winter weather we had, parks are overflowing with people excited to be outside enjoying the nicer weather finally,” said Vainieri Huttle (D-Bergen). “It’s great to see more and more people being able to enjoy healthy activities outside in an environment free of the significant health hazards posed by second-hand smoke. I commend Fort Lee and many of the other Bergen County towns that have stepped up as leaders in this latest public health battle. I hope the legislature will soon follow suit.”

Vainieri Huttle and Sokolich were joined by Bergen County officials, various mayors, representatives from **NJ GASP (Global Advisor on Smoke-free Policy)** and the Bergen County Prevention Coalition at Constitution Park in Fort Lee. With roughly three dozen municipalities already enacting similar bans in Bergen County, Vainieri Huttle pointed to the county as a leader in the growing movement to reduce public exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke and preserve the state’s natural assets by reducing litter and fire risks.

“Whether you’re a smoker or adamantly anti-smoking, I think this is a movement we all can, and should, get behind in the interest of protecting our children and our natural resources,” said Sokolich. “The negative effects of second-hand smoke and the impact smoking has on our environment are undeniable. Fort Lee is proud to join with Assemblywoman Vainieri Huttle and many other Bergen County towns to lead the way on this issue and hopefully inspire many more to follow suit.”

Vainieri Huttle is the lead sponsor of legislation (A-1080), approved overwhelmingly by the Assembly in March, which would prohibit smoking at public parks and beaches throughout New Jersey.

Vainieri Huttle cited the dangers of second-hand smoke, the long-term non-biodegradability of cigarette butts, and the fire hazards posed by discarded cigarettes, as just some of the many reasons to ban smoking in outdoor public places.

“The prohibition of smoking at public parks and beaches would better preserve the natural assets of this state by reducing litter and increasing fire safety in those areas, while lessening exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke among the public. This is an extension of a movement that has been building over the last 10 years and it’s the right thing to do,” added Vainieri Huttle.

Vainieri Huttle’s bill would prohibit smoking at any state park or forest, county or municipal park, or state or municipal beach. The penalties that currently apply to a person who smokes in an indoor public place or workplace, in violation of the “New Jersey Smoke Free Air Act,” would apply to a comparable violation of her bill. These include a fine of not less than \$250 for the first offense, \$500 for the second offense and \$1,000 for each subsequent offense.

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