

The Trentonian

Sen. Turner Proposes Reinstating Tobacco Control Program, Boosting Free Breakfast program

David Foster, March 20, 2014

State Sen. Shirley Turner (D-Mercer/Hunterdon) is looking to help smokers kick the habit and leave no students' stomach empty.

This week, she introduced legislation to reinstate the state's tobacco control program and boost participation in the free breakfast program for students.

Turner said the tobacco program was defunded under Gov. Chris Christie's administration. She hopes to reinstate funding to the 2010 level of \$7.5 million.

"The bill would provide funding to help restore our smoking cessation and prevention program," Turner stated. "We have allowed too many years of opportunity to pass when we could have been helping people quit the deadly habit. It's a great return on our small investment when we can help save lives and prevent long-term diseases by reducing the number of smokers who are exposing themselves and others to carcinogens through second-hand smoke. We want to educate our children to prevent them from developing the addictive smoking habit."

To prove the need for the program, Turner said last month the Campaign for Tobacco-Free kids ranked the Garden State last nationally for protecting children against the dangers of smoking and tobacco use. The group said New Jersey is the only state that spends zilch on prevention.

Turner also said the state is receiving approximately \$92 million from a national tobacco settlement, and that money is going to the budget deficit, not to help with smoking addiction.

The state senator is also calling to increase enrollment in the School Breakfast Program by establishing "Breakfast After the Bell" during the first period or first few minutes of each school day.

"Currently, there are too few eligible school children in our poorest school districts participating in school breakfast programs," Turner stated. "Research has consistently shown that a healthy breakfast boosts attendance, improves academic performance and student effectiveness."

Citing statistics from the Advocates for Children of New Jersey, Turner said approximately 300,000 children statewide are missing the most important meal of the day.

In Mercer County, the organization estimates 30 percent of eligible students received breakfast last April.

"The first job for a school district is to give students the best education possible and the best opportunity to become a contributing member of society," Turner stated. "Studies show something as simple as eating breakfast helps academic achievement; therefore, we have a moral responsibility to make sure we are doing all we can to help students succeed."

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