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VITALE-SMITH BILL TO PROHIBIT USE OF SMOKELESS TOBACCO IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS CLEARS SENATE

TRENTON – Legislation sponsored by Senate Health Committee Chair Joseph Vitale and Senator Bob Smith that would prohibit the use of smokeless tobacco in or on the grounds of public schools in New Jersey cleared the Senate today.

“Our law must be consistent as it relates to tobacco and our schools. Smokeless tobacco is just as dangerous and addictive as other smoking methods and its use must also be prohibited from school grounds or property,” said Senator Vitale (D-Middlesex). “This bill will close that gap in current law and will ensure a healthier environment in New Jersey’s schools.”

Under the bill, S-293, the “use of smokeless tobacco” means the inhalation, chewing, or placement in the oral cavity of snuff, chewing tobacco, or any other matter or substance which contains tobacco, such as the relatively new product called snus. The board of education of every school district would be tasked with the placement of clear signs in every public entrance to a public school building in its district indicating that the use of smokeless tobacco is prohibited in the school.

“Tobacco products, in all their forms, do not belong in our schools. The health implications of smokeless tobacco, which include cancer, heart and oral disease, are devastating,” said Senator Smith (D-Middlesex, Somerset). “Tobacco use often starts young, and we have to do what we can to prevent our youth from picking up the habit. One logical place to start is in our schools.”

Penalties for using smokeless tobacco in or on school grounds would be a fine of at least \$250 for the first offense, \$500 for the second offense, and \$1,000 for each subsequent offense. If a student violates the provisions of the bill, he or she would not be subject to fines but rather would be prohibited by the district’s board of education from participation in all extracurricular activities, including interscholastic athletics, and subject to the revocation of any student parking permit. The board of education would have the latitude to establish the length of a suspension or revocation to be imposed for initial or subsequent violations.

According to data reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 2 of every 100 middle school students and 6 of every 100 high school students reported current use of smokeless tobacco in 2015. Among high school students who have reported smokeless tobacco use, 10% were male students and 1.8% were female.

The CDC also reported that high school athletes are more likely to use smokeless tobacco than their peers who are non-athletes. Additionally, research shows that because young people who use smokeless tobacco can become addicted to nicotine, they may be more likely to also become cigarette smokers. The bill, S-293, cleared the Senate with a vote of 35-2. It next heads to the Assembly for consideration.