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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Outrage over Sayreville Decision to Increase Age for Tobacco Purchase to 21

*Measure will deny legal adults the freedom of consumer choice;
Small business owners will suffer as consumers look elsewhere to purchase tobacco;
Local government oversteps its bounds with "feel good" measure*

Sal Risalvato, Executive Director of the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience, Automotive Association (NJGCA), released the following statement in reaction to the Sayreville Town Council's decision to raise the minimum age to purchase tobacco to 21 years old:

"Many people deplore the use of tobacco products. I am one of them. However, it is the right of every adult consumer to decide which products to indulge in, and which to abstain from. This Sayreville ordinance removes that freedom of choice from legal adults, who are old enough to sign a contract, get married, or go to war, yet are apparently incapable of deciding whether to use tobacco products."

"I feel wholeheartedly," Risalvato said, "that children **should not** have access to tobacco products. However, that is **NOT** the demographic that this ordinance targets. We are talking about 19 and 20 year old adults, and while this ban imposes a slight burden on those **legal** tobacco purchasers, the small business owners will bear the brunt of this nonsensical Council decision."

"Sayreville is only one town. Not only will small business owners lose business to their competitors in neighboring towns, literally right down the street just over the city limits, but the retailers are the only ones who would be penalized if the provisions of the ordinance are violated. According to town codes, the ordinance proposes fines of up to \$1,000. Where are the penalties for the people who attempt to purchase cigarettes in violation of the city ordinance?" Risalvato asked.

"Recently, the Englewood City Council passed a similar ordinance, however, at the time, my organization was unaware that such a proposal was being discussed. Last night, I went to the Sayreville Town Council meeting, with a member of my staff and multiple small business owners from the local community, to discuss our concerns with the Council and educate them. We urged them to consider how detrimental such an ordinance would be, without accomplishing anything other than driving tobacco sales into neighboring municipalities. They ignored the information presented to them, and proceeded to pass a "feel-good" ordinance which will undoubtedly be unsuccessful in preventing any 19 or 20 year olds from purchasing tobacco," Risalvato continued.

Risalvato angrily questioned, "How would you like to be a store owner working the sales registers when a 20 year old in a military uniform attempts to buy a pack of cigarettes? Are you going to deny the person serving our nation from making the purchase? Do you honor the soldier, make the sale, and then risk a \$250 fine? Or worse do you risk spending time in jail or losing your business? Does the governing body in Sayreville really think that this "feel good" law will stop young people from smoking?

"There is no question, young people should learn about the very real dangers that smoking imposes on one's health. Only through education and awareness can the use of tobacco be combated. Failing that, it won't matter if the legal age to purchase tobacco products is 21, 25, or 30 – grown men and women have a right to make choices without government interference. The people that this ordinance is trying to protect are lawful adults, who have a right to make any number of decisions for themselves, including the foolish choice to smoke. In the process, it must be acknowledged that small business owners will suffer as a result of this ordinance, and should not be burdened with policing our youth from making foolish choices. This is a dumb ordinance. It's not dumb because of its intentions, it is dumb because it won't keep one person from smoking if they want too, and it penalizes small business owners for the sake of the appearance of doing something that is laudable," Risalvato concluded.

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