

Vaping epidemic to get more scrutiny in the Texas Senate

Seven states have already taken steps to ban vaping or e-cigarettes and now a key Texas official is calling on lawmakers to take a closer look into the industry as well. Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, a Republican who leads the Texas Senate, has instructed two committees to look into new potential vaping regulations. The Senate Criminal Justice Committee will review whether penalties are stiff enough to keep vaping and e-cigarettes out of the hands of minors.

The Health and Human Services Committee will look into the broader “emerging public health concerns” related to the devices. Earlier this year, Gov. Greg Abbott signed a bill into law that increases the smoking age in Texas from 18 to 21. That includes e-cigarettes. The e-cigarette industry is already facing lawsuits and increased federal scrutiny amid allegations it has created an epidemic of illnesses among teens. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has tied vaping devices to the deaths of 34 people and the illnesses of an additional 1,600 people. Last year, the Food and Drug Administration began looking into the marketing practices of e-cigarette companies to see if they are targeting minors with fruit and candy-flavored products. In response, President Donald Trump has announced plans to remove all flavored e-cigarette products from the market. The Texas Legislature does not meet in a regular session until 2021, but the lieutenant governor and House Speaker typically issue “interim charges” related to topics they want lawmakers reviewing to prepare for the next time they meet. Patrick’s interim charges include dozens of other topics, such as broadly reviewing recently enacted property tax reform laws, looking into more ways to “protect the lives of the unborn” and studying how local governments use tax dollars to lobby the state government. In all, Patrick said he’s issued 116 charges to committees in the Texas Senate. The House has not issued any interim charges yet.

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