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Hawaii News

Proposed smoking ban to protect children advances

By [Gordon Y.K. Pang](#)

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A woman smoked a cigarette, in March 2013, while sitting in her truck in Hayneville, Ala. Honolulu City Councilman Ernie Martin was set to vote against a bill hitting smokers with another ban, but said Tuesday he was moved to change his mind at the urging of a fellow gym member at the Nuuanu YMCA.

Honolulu City Councilman Ernie Martin was set to vote against a bill hitting smokers with another ban, but said Tuesday he was moved to change his mind at the urging of a fellow gym member at the Nuuanu YMCA.

The Council Public Health, Safety and Welfare Committee voted to advance [Bill 70](#), banning smoking in vehicles when there are minors present. The ban would apply to tobacco products as well as electronic smoking devices.

Martin, who typically votes against measures he considers overregulation or an encroachment on individual rights, said he initially was prepared to vote against the bill. But then he was approached by a fellow gym regular, who typically doesn't bend his ear on political matters.

Martin said he at first told the man that the legislation wasn't needed because no one with common sense would light up a cigarette in a car with young children in it.

"He told me, 'Ernie, my son-in-law, (with) my two grandkids both under 5 in the car, he smokes in the car with the windows up when he takes them to preschool every morning. And one of my grandkids already has asthma,'" Martin said.

"If this measure is only going to help that one particular grandfather with his grandkid, then it's the right thing to do," he added.

The bill was introduced by Council members Brandon Elefante and Ron Menor, who reiterated their support for the measure. Mayor Kirk Caldwell has previously said he intends to sign the bill if it is approved by the Council and passes legal muster.

Lila Johnson, program manager for the state Department of Health's Tobacco Prevention and Education Program, said that the surgeon general and other leading health authorities believe "there is no risk-free level to secondhand smoke and the only effective way to protect people from harm is to totally eliminate smoking in enclosed spaces."

Two private citizens — a retired school counselor and a registered nurse — supported the bill and testified about their firsthand experiences dealing with children who've been exposed to smoke.

No one at the meeting opposed the bill. But in written testimony, a representative for the Hawaii Smokers Alliance said parenting decisions should be left up to parents. "The city government needs to butt out of people's private lives," he wrote.

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