

SEN. MEASURE ALLOWING LOCAL SMOKING LIMITS STALLS

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RICHMOND, Va. (AP) -- A Senate bill that would allow Virginia localities to enact their own restrictions on smoking in restaurants has stalled in committee.

The Committee on Local Government deadlocked Tuesday on two votes - one to outright reject the legislation, the other to refer the bill to a more favorable committee. The 6-6 votes means the bill can resurface this session before the same committee.

The proposed legislation has been pushed by several localities, which have sought approval to restrict restaurant smoking. Statewide smoking restrictions have repeatedly failed in the General Assembly.

Representatives of retail merchants and the hospitality industry argued against the Senate proposal, contending many restaurants are voluntarily choosing to limit smoking.

They said to impose local limits would harm businesses already suffering in an already brutal economy.