

Planned smoking curbs face long odds in Capitol



Cora Marsh, 18, smokes a cigarette with friends Sunday in an alley near Guadalupe Street. The legal age to buy or possess tobacco products is 18 in Texas. JAY JANNER / AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Bills would raise legal age to have tobacco products, ban smoking in most public places.

By Chuck Lindell
clindell@statesman.com

For the fourth consecutive legislative session, a Democratic state senator from San Antonio is trying to raise the legal age for buying or possessing cigarettes and other tobacco products.

Despite falling short in his previous attempts to boost the legal age from 18 to 19, Sen. Carlos Uresti is upping the

ante this time with a bill outlawing tobacco products for Texans under 21 years old.

It would be the highest legal smoking age in America, where 46 states place the tobacco limit at 18 and the rest — Alabama, Alaska, New Jersey and Utah — opted for 19.

Uresti hopes to light a fire under his colleagues by stressing the lives and money his bill would save.

“Smoking-related illnesses cause more deaths than alcohol, car accidents, illegal drugs, suicides, homicides, driving while intoxicated and fire — combined,” he told members of a Senate

committee last month. “The annual health care cost in Texas directly caused by smoking is \$5.83 billion, and \$1.6 billion of that is covered by Medicaid.”

Uresti’s bill, however, faces an uphill climb — as does separate legislation to ban smoking in most public places across Texas.

Partisan ideals about the proper role of government, combined with a deep Texas tradition of respect for personal choices, often trump the promise of lives and money saved.

Smoking continued on A6