

Debate heats up on bill to freeze teen tanning

By [Jessica Fargen](#)

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A controversial plan to outlaw anyone under age 16 from using a tanning bed has melanoma patients, skin doctors and salon owners debating how young is too young to tan inside and just how dangerous is it.

Glenna Kohl, 24, who has Stage 4 melanoma that has spread to her brain and abdomen, said she used her first tanning bed at age 15. She told the joint Public Health Committee yesterday that she wishes she knew then what she knows now.

"I didn't really know anything about them, except that I wanted to get a tan for a dance," said the Cape Cod woman who wore a pink bandana over her bald head. "I wish every day I had heard a story similar to mine."

Melanoma is the leading cause of cancer deaths in women ages 25 to 29, and overall the deadliest form of skin cancer. Some melanoma experts believe there's a direct link between the rising rate of melanoma in young women and tanning beds, although the tanning bed industry disputes that.

The bill, filed by Sen. James E. Timilty (D-Walpole), would require written parental consent for anyone age 16 or 17 who wants to tan. No one under 16 could use a tanning bed. Under current law, anyone under 14 can use a tanning bed if accompanied by a parent. Teens 14 to 17 can tan with written parental permission.

"We have an epidemic of tanning bed use in the U.S.," said Dr. Alan Geller, a Boston University dermatologist.

Jerry Frank, CEO of Cosmedico, a Weymouth company that makes tanning bed parts, said the state's tanning industry already has "regulations on top of regulations."

"This is a parental decision," he said.

Steve Going, who owns two tanning salons in Worcester, worries it will hurt small tanning salons that already get a bad rap.

"Bills like this not only are unfair, but hurt me very much as a businessman," he said.



Glenna Kohl, 24, of Barnstable, who has Stage 4 melanoma, says she didn't know the dangers of tanning when she first used a bed at age 15. (Staff photo by Angela Rowlings)