

## Taxing Your Vanity

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Would you be willing to pay taxes on your favorite cosmetic procedure? Or would the extra cost keep you from removing those wrinkles, lifting that face, and tucking that tummy?

While New Jersey is the only state to have passed the bill (in the summer of 2004 under Governor McGreevey), several others have introduced or considered their own versions, including Texas, Illinois, Washington, Arkansas, Tennessee and New York.

So far, all of those attempts have been unsuccessful.

Assemblyman Joseph Cryan (D-NJ), who introduced the cosmetic surgery tax bill, tells *The Early Show* it was introduced to narrow a budget gap.

He says, "When we looked at the numbers and rolled it up in a meeting with the governor's office, we felt that demographically, since the surgery was elective, it was a fair tax."

In New Jersey, he says, the tax money is used to provide medical care for those who can't afford it.

On the other side of the argument, most doctors (particularly plastic surgeons) are vehemently opposed to the taxation, because they view it as inappropriate to tax a medical procedure. Dr. Peter Hetzler, a New Jersey plastic surgeon, is one of them.

He says, "We don't feel as physicians that any procedure should be taxed. We think there are three reasons. No. 1: What's next?"

"The second thing is, it does discriminate against people, despite the fact he quotes figures about the increase with plenty of men having surgery.

"The third thing that we have a problem with, and I especially have a problem with, is that it certainly strains and dehumanizes the patient-doctor relationship, which is critical."

Hetzler points out just because it is a cosmetic procedure does not mean that there are no potential complications.

He says, "You have to be serious about this. When you go through all of these issues, then you find out the patient has to pay the hospital a tax, the anesthesiologist a tax, the surgeon a tax, and then, after all of this..."

"I don't buy that," says Cryan, interrupting. "I think that's kind of, respectfully, a little bit of nonsense. Talking about a sales tax here on elective surgery generally not covered by health insurance."

Thus far, New Jersey has raised a lot less money than they thought they were going to.

"We actually raised about \$7 million this year," Cryan says, "\$7 million for those who couldn't afford medical care by itself."

Dr. Hetzler says, on his end, it is hurting the business.

Here is a list plastic surgery costs:

**Botox:** Average Cost: \$376 (With 6 percent tax: \$399)

**Laser hair removal:** Average Cost: \$428 (With 6 percent tax: \$454)

**Breast Implants:** Average Cost: \$3,373 (With 6 percent tax: \$3,575)

**Tummy Tuck:** Average Cost: \$4,505 (With 6 percent tax: \$4,775)

**Facelift:** Average Cost: \$4,822 (With 6 percent tax: \$5,111)

Source: [American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2004](#)