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Council Blocks Mayor's Consumer Bill

Staff Reporter of the Sun

The City Council is blocking Mayor Bloomberg's plan to toughen regulation of small businesses by the Department of Consumer Affairs, officials said yesterday.

Council leaders have decided not to pass a resolution in support of the measure at today's meeting, effectively forestalling action by the state legislature. The proposal would have given the department broader authority to penalize violators at internal hearings rather than going to court, and added to the city's leverage in collecting fines.

The council's delay is a kind of consolation prize for small business owners, who have apparently lost their battle to

block a dramatic increase in the city's cigarette tax, to \$1.50 from 8 cents per pack, to help close a \$4.8 billion budget gap. The chairwoman of the council's state and federal legislation committee, Maria Baez of the Bronx, said through a spokesman that she wanted to study the consumer enforcement issue further before recommending action in Albany. Since state lawmakers are due to go home for the summer this week or next, the proposal is unlikely to become law until next year.

"Anything is possible, but so far... the council is holding firm to a commitment not to do this bill," said a lobbyist for the Neighborhood Retail Alliance, Richard Lipsky.