

Bills focus on minors serving alcohol, increased beer tax

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Bethany Knipp, Nebraska News Service.

LINCOLN—Making sure employees under age 21 won't serve alcohol to other minors was the purpose of a bill in the General Affairs Committee Monday, March 4. Another alcohol-related bill would increase beer taxes.

Under the LB444, introduced by Sen. Bob Krist of Omaha, employees who sell alcohol would have to complete a training course to do so.

Underage workers could sell in a licensed retail establishment as long as another authorized person who is at least 21 was on the premise, essentially supervising the sale.

Krist said the legislation is necessary because minors who sell alcohol might be pressured into selling their underage peers a drink. Alcohol servers and sellers now have to be 19 years old.

Proponent Brenda Worth said she was in favor of the bill because Worth's brother and nephew died as a result of being served by minors.

Worth said there is a lot of peer pressure in small towns for minors to serve their friends on top of more responsibility.

"They themselves aren't old enough to drink and then they also have to make a decision on whether or not to serve this person and to cut off this person who might be 21 years old," she said.

Kathy Siefken, director of the Nebraska Grocery Industry Association, said she opposed the bill because some retailers already have training and certification programs, adding that the proposed requirement would increase costs without being very effective.

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Under the bill, a person's certification would have to be renewed every three years. Siefken said that wouldn't be enough training to stop the problem. What would stop it would be managers, according to Siefken.

"A deterrent are those good managers that repeat that training on a regular basis and that's how you stop the sales to minors," she said.

Along with these issues, Seifken said a provision in the bill that would allow for the revocation of liquor licenses for retailers with any one uncertified employee was problematic.

"That seems a little harsh to revoke a license because one person slipped through the cracks," she said.

The General Affairs Committee also heard testimony regarding LB653, which would increase tax on beer by 5 cents a gallon.

Sen. Al Davis of Hyannis, the bill's introducer, said 27 percent of Nebraska's criminal activity last year was related to alcohol.

Davis said the tax on beer would put revenue into Nebraska's law enforcement to help with the increased workload to which alcohol-related incidents contribute.

The 5-cent increase would bring the total tax on beer to 36 cents a gallon.

Siefken also testified against LB653 saying that \$2.3 million would be taken from Nebraska taxpayers, but Davis said the tax would be miniscule and wouldn't affect people who don't drink beer.

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“This tax would be about a nickel on a 12-pack,” he said.

No one testified in favor of the bill.

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