

TESTIMONY OF CHRIS WAGNER
Project Extra Mile
LB 635 – General Affairs Committee
February 11, 2019

Good afternoon, Chairman Briese and members of the committee. My name is Chris Wagner, and I am the executive director of Project Extra Mile, a network of community partnerships across the state working to prevent excessive alcohol consumption, including underage drinking and its tragic consequences. We are here today to support LB 635.

This bill seeks to increase the number of Liquor Control Commissioners from three to five. Our organization has attended nearly every monthly Liquor Control Commission (LCC) hearing for much of our 22-year history. In recent years, we have been numerous times when one commissioner was unable to attend, forcing the remaining two commissioners to either rule unanimously or postpone specific cases. We cannot recall of any instance when a case was postponed due to this circumstance. We feel commissioners should not feel pressured to agree on every case that happens to be scheduled in a given month. Commissioners should be encouraged and able to vote their conscience based on the evidence presented.

We would also take this opportunity to ask that this committee amend LB 635 to require that at least one commissioner represent public health and at least one represent public safety. Because alcohol is no ordinary commodity and when consumed in excess endangers the health, safety and welfare of all Nebraskans, it is important that experts in these areas be a part of the “careful control and regulation of the manufacture, distribution, and sale of alcoholic liquor” as the Legislature has laid out in 53-101.01.

The need for public health and safety voices at the LCC is more relevant than ever given that Governor Ricketts just appointed Harry Hoch, a former alcohol industry executive of 30 years, to fill the remainder of Bob Batt’s term as commissioner. The industry absolutely should not be in a position to regulate itself – it is not in our state’s best interests in light of the challenges we already face. As a result, we would also urge this committee to further restrict former industry members from being eligible for appointment.

We would ask that you advance LB 635 to General File with the aforementioned amendments. Thank you for your consideration.