

LB 734
General Affairs Committee
Testimony of Chris Wagner
Project Extra Mile
March 4, 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 and its tragic consequences. We are here today in support of LB 734.

Underage drinking and excessive drinking were foreseeable consequences of the 2011 statutory change that eased restrictions on open containers in certain vehicles on Nebraska roadways. Our organization has been contacted by law enforcement desiring to do more to reduce the problems that these businesses can cause. An important first step would be for this committee to pass LB 734 to require the licensure of charter bus services under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act. Doing so would allow law enforcement easier access to the buses and will hold these companies more accountable.

However, LB 734 could better prevent underage and binge drinking through an amendment to prohibit those under the age of 21 from boarding the buses when alcohol is being consumed. Doing so would drastically reduce minors' ability to access alcohol in an environment that until now has been relatively risk free. We would respectfully urge the committee to consider offering such an amendment.

According to the Pacific Institute of Research and Evaluation, underage drinking cost our state \$325 million in 2013 alone and resulted in an estimated three homicides, 13 traffic fatalities and 542 nonfatal traffic injuries, 2,700 nonfatal violent crimes and 114 teen pregnancies (PIRE, 2015).

We would urge the committee to advance LB 734, and we appreciate your consideration of our comments and suggestions.

UNDERAGE DRINKING IN NEBRASKA

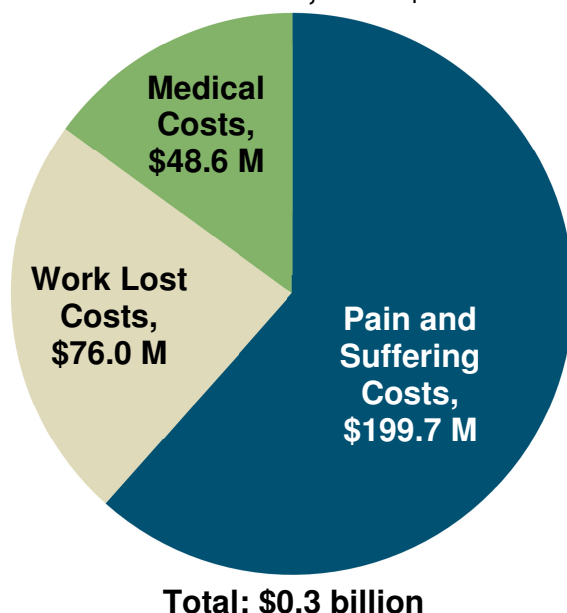
The Facts

Tragic health, social, and economic problems result from the use of alcohol by youth. Underage drinking is a causal factor in a host of serious problems, including homicide, suicide, traumatic injury, drowning, burns, violent and property crime, high-risk sex, fetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol poisoning, and the need for treatment of alcohol abuse and dependence.

Problems and Costs Associated with Underage Drinking in Nebraska

In 2013, underage drinking cost the citizens of Nebraska \$0.3 billion. These costs include medical care, work loss, and pain and suffering associated with the multiple problems resulting from the use of alcohol by youth.¹ This translates to \$1,779 per year for each youth in the state or \$4.69 per drink consumed underage. Excluding pain and suffering from these costs, tangible costs of underage drinking including medical care, criminal justice, property damage, and loss of work in Nebraska totaled \$124.58 million each year or \$1.80 per drink. In contrast, a drink in Nebraska retails for \$0.79.

**Costs of Underage Drinking
Nebraska, 2013 \$**



**Costs of Underage Drinking by Problem,
Nebraska, 2013 \$**

Problem	Total Costs (in millions)
Youth violence	\$151.2
Youth traffic crashes	\$82.5
High-risk sex, Ages 14–20 years	\$10.2
Property and public order crime	\$0.8
Youth injury	\$22.1
Poisonings and psychoses	\$2.9
Fetal alcohol syndrome among mothers aged 15–20 years	\$5.8
Youth alcohol treatment	\$30.8
Total	\$324.5 (e.g. \$0.3 B)

Youth violence (homicide, suicide, aggravated assault) and traffic crashes attributable to alcohol use by underage youth in Nebraska represent the largest costs for the state. However, a host of other problems contribute substantially to the overall cost. Among teen mothers, fetal alcohol syndrome alone costs Nebraska \$6 million.

In 2012, 803 youth aged 12 to 20 years were admitted for alcohol treatment in Nebraska, accounting for 7% of all treatment admissions for alcohol abuse in the state.² Young people who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence and are two and a half times more likely to become

abusers of alcohol than those who begin drinking at age 21.³ We did not cost these adult problems.

Alcohol Consumption by Youth in Nebraska

Underage drinking is widespread in Nebraska. Approximately 44,000 underage customers drink each year in Nebraska. In 2013, Nebraska students in grades 9 to 12 reported the following:⁴

- 52.1% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 12.9% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
- 22.1% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasions in the past 30 days.
- 13.6% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (binge drinking) in the past 30 days.

In 2012, underage customers consumed 7.8% of all alcohol sold in Nebraska, totaling \$54 million in sales (in 2013 dollars). These sales provided profits of \$27 million to the alcohol industry.¹ Ranking states based on the percentage of alcohol consumed underage, with 1 the highest, Nebraska ranked number 38. This percentage is affected by both adult and youth drinking levels.

Annual sales of alcohol consumed by youth in Nebraska averaged \$1,234 per underage customer. Underage customers were heavier consumers than adults. They drank an average of 4.3 drinks per day; in contrast, legal customers consumed only 1.6.

Harm Associated with Underage Drinking in Nebraska

Underage drinking in Nebraska leads to substantial harm due to traffic crashes, violent crime, property crime, unintentional injury, and high-risk sex.

- During 2012, an estimated 13 traffic fatalities and 542 nonfatal traffic injuries were attributable to driving after underage drinking.
- In 2012, an estimated 3 homicides; 2,700 nonfatal violent crimes such as rape, robbery, and assault; 4,500 property crimes including burglary, larceny, and car theft; and 84,000 public order crimes including vandalism, disorderly conduct, loitering, and curfew violations were attributable to underage drinking.
- In 2011, an estimated 2 alcohol-involved fatal burns, drownings, and suicides were attributable to underage drinking.
- In 2013, an estimated 114 teen pregnancies and 4,281 teens having high-risk sex were attributable to underage drinking.

For comparison with other states, in U.S. rather than state prices, the harm from underage drinking per youth in Nebraska averages \$857. Such comparisons require caution. In part, they may reflect differences in crime and crash rates, problem-reporting to police, and co-occurring drug use.

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¹ Levy, D.T., Miller, T.R., & Cox, K.C. (2003). Underage drinking: societal costs and seller profits. Working Paper. Calverton, MD: PIRE.

² Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Treatment Episode Data Set. (2013). *Substance Abuse Treatment by Primary Substance of Abuse, According to Sex, Age, Race, and Ethnicity, 2011*. Available [Online]: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/SAMHDA/studies/30462>

³ Grant, B.F., & Dawson, D.A. (1997). Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9: 103-110.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control (CDC). (2013). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). Available [Online]: <http://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Default.aspx>. Or an equivalent state data system.