

Some Public Health Advocates Want More Liquor Law Enforcement

Written by Melissa Rosales

Some public health experts and advocates in Nebraska are asking state senators to allocate money for more liquor law enforcement.

Restaurants can offer to-go cocktails permanently under a new state law passed last year. Some lobbyists like Chris Wagner, executive director of Project Extra Mile in Omaha, want to see more policies on alcohol use in Nebraska. The organization sent a letter to state senators with recommendations for the legislative session including increasing the alcohol excise tax. The tax of about \$0.03 per drink hasn't changed since 2003.

"If the tax isn't tied to the price, it loses its value, and then becomes less effective in preventing the harms that we see in our communities," Wagner said. "So there is a strong case, and it is considered the best strategy for preventing [alcohol-related] harm, is to increase the price of the alcohol through taxation."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has ranked Nebraska as the fifth-worst binge drinking state in the country. The CDC recommends the state at least double the alcohol tax to prevent more community harm.

The Monument Prevention Coalition in Scottsbluff also signed the letter to state senators. Executive Director Lanette Richards hopes senators will add more funds to liquor law enforcement. The Nebraska State Patrol investigates liquor license applications and monitors businesses for any violations. With miles of road, and over a hundred liquor licenses issued, the Panhandle only has one alcohol liquor enforcement officer.

"I just think to expect the one officer to handle all of that is kind of unreal," she said. "He does a great job. He's on the road, but there's many times he's working very long days and without days off, to try to keep on top of it."

Richards says it would be a big help if the officer had someone to help with the work.