

**LB 301**  
**General Affairs Committee**  
**Testimony of Chris Wagner**  
**Project Extra Mile**  
**January 30, 2023**

Good afternoon, Chairman Lowe and members of the committee. My name is Chris Wagner, and I am here representing Project Extra Mile, a network of community partnerships working in Nebraska to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms. We are here in support of LB 301.

Increasing the price of alcohol through taxation is strongly supported by scientific research as one of the best ways to decrease excessive alcohol consumption and its associated harms, something we desperately need in our state.

Nebraska experiences over 700 alcohol-related deaths each year, resulting in over 17,000 years of potential life lost. Recent research has shown that 1 in 8 working-age Americans died from alcohol-related causes. Among 20- to 49-year-olds it was 1 in 5 and 1 in 4 for 20- to 34-year-olds. This is one of the reasons why our state pays an estimated \$1.2 billion in economic costs each year due to excessive alcohol consumption.

We're also the second-worst self-reported alcohol-impaired driving state in the country with nearly double the national average at 955 episodes of alcohol-impaired driving per 1,000 population. This means that we have almost as many DUI episodes (going from point A to B) as we do men, women, and children in our state. We're also the sixth-worst binge drinking state with 19.5% of adults 18 and older reporting binge drinking at least once in the last 30 days. Four of our cities rank among the 30 worst cities in country (among those indexed): Lincoln (1), Omaha (13), Sioux City (26), and Grand Island (29).

Alcohol tax increases in other states have produced some impressive results. After tax increases in 2009, researchers found that fatal alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes decreased by 26%. An analysis of a 2011 alcohol sales tax law in MD found that it decreased binge drinking among adults by 17% and by 28% among youth, as well as a 21% drop in gonorrhea cases and an 11% decrease in chlamydia cases.

Of course, the increase in this bill applies only to ready-to-drink cocktails and it would return the excise tax to the previous rate, which was only cut last year. But if you look at the history of alcohol taxes in Nebraska, we are currently in the longest period since any excise tax rate was raised – 20 years ago in 2003 – and the second longest period immediately preceded that increase – 16 years in 1987. Because the excise tax is based on volume instead of price, the value of the tax has significantly decreased since 2003 due to inflation.

Please vote to advance LB 301 to General File to improve the health and safety of our communities, make workplaces more productive, and deliver a tax break to all Nebraskan taxpayers who pay around \$491 million every year because of the 19.5% of adults in our state that consume alcohol excessively.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.