



Alcohol training proposal gets mixed reviews

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COLUMBUS — A proposal that would require specific training for anyone who sells alcohol in Columbus received mixed reactions Monday from a crowd that generally supported the idea but questioned its feasibility and costs.

The Training for Intervention Procedures, known as TiPS, is offered through East Central District Health Department and focuses on ensuring alcohol is served responsibly and legally.

Local law enforcement would like to see it become a requirement for all liquor license holders as a way to cut down on sales to minors and intoxicated people and reduce alcohol-related accidents.

Columbus Police Chief William Gumm told the city's Public Property, Safety and Works Committee that most businesses follow the state alcohol laws, but occasionally there are violations. One of the excuses given by individuals who fail compliance checks conducted by his department is that they don't have sufficient knowledge or training regarding the regulations, Gumm said.

The city ordinance change would mandate training for employees at local businesses with on-site or to-go alcohol sales, such as bars, restaurants and grocery and convenience stores, as well as volunteers serving alcohol as part of a fundraiser or community event.

"Ideally, it'd be nice to have everyone go through it," said Columbus Police Investigator Jeremy Zywiec, "but we realize that's probably not practical."

Instead, a tweak to the proposal could mandate the full five-hour TiPS training course for employees selling alcohol where on-site consumption occurs while other businesses are allowed to train only managers who pass the information on to other employees.

Gumm said he's "not comfortable" with the latter option, however, it may be a necessary compromise to appease some of the city's approximately 30 liquor license holders.

Marge Trent, manager of the local Walmart, told the committee she supports the training if it's limited to only management.

Walmart already requires employees who sell alcohol to complete an extensive training course, she said, and the business hasn't failed a compliance check.

Jed Brunken, owner of the Corner Stop convenience store, agreed with Trent, saying training is good but it must be practical.

“We need to make this as convenient as we can,” said Brunken, who told the committee he offered to pay his staff to take an upcoming TiPS training course and nobody signed up.

Brunken and the owner of 4 Jokers Bar favor an online training option that’s more flexible for employees.

However, it comes with additional expenses.

According to Brenda Preister, who coordinates the TiPS program at East Central, the training costs \$16 in-person and closer to \$40 online. The health department has grant funding to offset the expenses for businesses, she said, but less could utilize this money at the more expensive rate.

For business owners like Ken Andreasen, the additional expenses may outweigh the benefits of having a liquor license.

The owner of Valentino’s Pizza said the restaurant doesn’t sell much alcohol, which makes the cost of training a staff that frequently changes even harder to justify. “I just don’t see how you could fund this,” Andreasen said.

The TiPS certification stays with an individual for three years, even if they change jobs, and likely wouldn’t be required before an employee can begin work. A suggestion from Monday’s meeting would give new hires a set amount of days to complete the course.

Other specifics, such as possible penalties for failing to meet the mandate, also must still be finalized.

The committee voted to draft an ordinance that will return to them for future consideration before heading to the full city council.

According to Zywiec, Kearney, Lincoln and Nebraska City already have similar ordinances in place and North Platte and Ogallala are considering an alcohol training requirement.