

Senate Commerce Committee

Aaron Jones 271-2609

SB 24, allowing students under age 21 to taste wine in educational settings.

Hearing Date: January 14, 2025

Time Opened: 9:45 a.m.

Time Closed: 10:02 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Innis, Murphy, McGough, Fenton and Reardon

Members of the Committee Absent : Senator Ricciardi

Bill Analysis: This bill allows students under age 21 to taste wine in certain educational settings.

Sponsors:

Sen. Innis

Sen. Lang

Sen. Ward

Sen. Gray

Sen. Abbas

Sen. Sullivan

Sen. Avarad

Sen. Rochefort

Sen. Murphy

Sen. McConkey

Sen. Pearl

Rep. Horrigan

Rep. Potucek

Rep. See

Rep. Thibault

Who supports the bill: Senator Daniel Innis, Senator Howard Pearl, Senator Mark McConkey, Senator David Rochefort, Senator James Gray, Senator Ruth Ward, Representative Heath Howard, Representative James Thibault, Representative Timothy Horrigan, Scott Schaier (NH Beer Distributors), Mike Somers (NH Lodging & Restaurant Association), Lauren Banker (University of New Hampshire), Curtis Howland

Who opposes the bill: No one

Who is neutral on the bill: Mark Armaganian (NH Liquor Commission)

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator Daniel Innis

- The objective of SB 24 is to provide opportunities to students at institutions of higher learning, who are ages 18 to 20, to learn more about wine, beer, and other products.
- This bill would require extensive supervision of students who participate in sip and spit tastings.

- The Liquor Commission will provide a training program to students who are enrolled in wine courses at the beginning of each semester that is offered.
- Senator Innis stated the responsible use of alcohol is incredibly important. The course and the training will provide students with an understanding of the risks and benefits of alcohol consumption, its health effects, and how to identify those who have been overserved.
- Eight states – California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, and Rhode Island – have passed similar legislation.
- Senator Innis said this bill would work for the state, community colleges and universities, and the tourism and hospitality industry where many students are employed.
- The objectives of the wine education course include important elements of wine and food matching, an investigation of the sensory aspects of wine, an understanding of the physiological issues of alcohol consumption, and the legal, ethical, and social responsibility associated with alcoholic beverage production, service, and consumption.
- Graduates from these courses will help to enhance the dining experience of guests as well as help businesses.
- Senator Innis reiterated this bill would have protections in place, while also creating responsible users of alcohol.
- Senator Innis said this bill was supported by the industry and higher education institutions.
- **Senator Fenton** asked how many schools taught or were interested in offering this class.
 - **Senator Innis** said the University of New Hampshire has one course on wine and beverages that is taught every semester and there are 85 available seats. This bill would expand the offering to other students. Currently, a student must be 21 years old to take the course.
- **Senator Reardon** asked why an absolution was given to someone under 21 years old being intoxicated in an academic setting.
 - **Senator Innis** replied that the intent was for them to not be drinking at all.
- **Senator Reardon** believed even in an academic setting, there should be a penalty for getting drunk. Under this scenario, they would be exempted from the law. She asked if Senator Innis would agree that they should not be absolved, and they should not be in the corner drinking.
 - **Senator Innis** said there would be strict supervision of every student. They are required to go to the front of the room to whoever is serving, and they must spit in a bucket. No one has gotten drunk in this course, and it is not in their interest to allow it to happen.

Mike Somers, President and CEO, New Hampshire Lodging and Restaurant Association

- Variations of similar legislation have been attempted in the past, and they have failed for a variety of reasons.
- Mr. Somers said it was time to pass it, especially given the demand for young wait staff and managers, particularly in middle to upper tier restaurants.

Representative Timothy Horrigan

- Representative Horrigan said the hospitality management program at Paul College was the crown jewel of the university system.
- This is an important industry, not just in terms of serving, but also producing wine, beer, and hard liquor from local products.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition: None

Neutral Information Presented:

Mark Armaganian, Chief of Enforcement, New Hampshire Liquor Commission

- Mr. Armaganian said they have worked together to reach this goal.
- The Division of Enforcement has been more progressive towards the industry. To be successful, industry members need to be creative. For accountability purposes, there also need to be limitations.
- Mr. Armaganian said there is a fine balance between educating, while also ensuring they are a good partner to help the industry get over hurdles.
- The statute mentioned by Senator Reardon is absolute; therefore, you have to create a cutout. For those who are underage, the legal limit is .02. While it looked like they were opening the door, Mr. Armaganian said it had oversight that would not create negative circumstances.
- States who offer this have drastically different rules, yet there has not been any negative data.