

# Senate Commerce Committee

*Aaron Jones 271-2609*

**SB 417-FN**, requiring state liquor outlets to post warnings relative to the increased risk of cancer and birth defects from drinking alcoholic beverages.

**Hearing Date:** January 13, 2026

**Time Opened:** 9:30 a.m.

**Time Closed:** 9:45 a.m.

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

**Members of the Committee Absent :** Senator Murphy

**Bill Analysis:** This bill requires on-premises licensees, off-premises licensees, and state liquor outlets to post warnings relative to the increased risk of cancer and birth defects from drinking alcoholic beverages.

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**Sponsors:**

Sen. Watters

Sen. Rosenwald

Sen. Prentiss

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**Who supports the bill:** Senator David Watters, Senator Cindy Rosenwald, Eleanor Gorman (Dover Youth to Youth), Braden Gilbert (Dover Youth to Youth), Megan Merrigan (Dover Youth to Youth), Kate Frey (New Futures), Matthew Brown, Sarah McCarthy, Rihanna Basur, Danielle Albushies, Katherine Lesnyk, Janet Lucas, Renu Basur, Ashley Lamb

**Who opposes the bill:** Kevin Daigle (NH Grocers Association), Mike Somers (NH Lodging & Restaurant Association), Julie Smith, Curtis Howland

**Who is neutral on the bill:** Kelley Scott

**Summary of testimony presented in support:**

***Senator David Watters***

- Senator Watters filed this bill on behalf of Dover Youth to Youth.
- Senator Watters provided the Committee with Amendment 26-0030s.
- Section 1 would include the phrase “drinking alcoholic beverages may increase cancer risk” to the existing warning that is required to be posted that women should not drink while pregnant due to the risk of birth defects. This change came from research in a recent Surgeon General’s report, which linked alcoholic beverages with a potential increase in cancer risk.

- There are many types of cancer, and some only effect women; therefore, Senator Watters believed it would be a useful health warning to add to the existing warning.
- Many cancers are slow to develop, but there is an increased risk particularly for younger individuals over time.
- Existing signs are provided by the Commission at little to no cost to on-premises and off-premises licensees. When new signs are printed, the new warning would be added. If an establishment did not want to put up a sign, they could use a display or electronic message board.

***Braden Gilbert, Megan Merrigan, and Eleanor Gorman, Dover Youth to Youth***

- Members of Dover Youth to Youth urged the Committee to pass this bill to help warn against the increased risk of cancer due to alcohol consumption.
- A 2025 U.S. Surgeon General's report found that consuming alcohol increases the risk of developing at least 7 types of cancer, including cancer of the colon, larynx, liver, throat, mouth, esophagus, and breast.
  - About 4 more women out of 100 are likely to develop breast cancer if they have two drinks a day.
  - In 2020, there were at least 741,300 cancer cases that could be connected to alcohol consumption.
  - Only 45 percent of adults are aware that drinking increases cancer risk. In comparison, 89 percent are aware of the link between tobacco and cancer.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has stated that drinking alcohol can increase cancer risk because “alcohol can disrupt cell cycles, increase chronic inflammation, and damage your DNA”.
- In the U.S., alcohol consumption is the third leading preventable cause of cancer.
- While not every individual who drinks alcohol will get cancer, any amount of alcohol consumption can increase the risk.
- Under the Alcoholic Beverage Labeling Act of 1988, alcohol products are required to have warning labels that state, “(I) According to the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects. (II) Consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery, and may cause health problems.”
- Warning labels have not been updated to reflect modern science, and advertisements and signage provided by the alcohol industry include even fewer warnings.
- Members of Dover Youth to Youth said this was a critical issue that had an impact on the lives and safety of New Hampshire families. If individuals are unaware of the risks, they are unable to take precautions to protect themselves.

***Kate Frey, Vice President of Advocacy, New Futures***

- Ms. Frey said there is strong scientific evidence of the relationship between the consumption of alcohol, even if it is light, and cancer.
- New Futures found many individuals, particularly younger ones, were unaware of the Surgeon General's findings.
- Ms. Frey said New Hampshire has been fortunate because we have a cooperative alcohol beverage control agency that is supportive of prevention messaging, and they help to provide mental health and substance use resources through 211.
- **Senator Ricciardi** asked if the D.A.R.E. program and others still provided education to students.
  - **Ms. Frey** said she did not know about the D.A.R.E. program specifically, but there had been concerns over whether it was evidence-based. Even with groups, such as Dover Youth to Youth, there is not always consistent messaging. The use of alcohol is very normalized, so it can be difficult to get messaging across to younger individuals who are not necessarily thinking about health issues.

**Summary of testimony presented in opposition:**

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

- Under current law, establishments are required to post at least 16 different notices. Mr. Somers asked at what point are they wallpapering businesses.
- Individuals already know the risk from engaging in these behaviors, and they are making personal decisions.
- Mr. Somers said the use of the phrase “prominent place” was ambiguous. He asked if it meant by the front door or by the bathroom.
- Businesses are already struggling due to the challenging economic times; therefore, Mr. Somers said individuals should not be discouraged from coming in to consume products available to them.

**Neutral Information Presented:** None