

ADVOCATING FOR AN ALCOHOL TAX INCREASE

A GUIDE FOR COMMUNITIES



Why increase the tax?

If you work in substance use prevention, you know about EBPs, or “evidence based practices”. If you need a refresher an EBP is an approach to programs or policy that integrates the best available research, data, expertise, and fidelity to achieve the best possible outcomes. Evidence-based practices are proven to work through solid research, showing they get results in certain situations or with specific groups. Raising the alcohol tax is one example of an EBP.

There is a lot of research that supports a tax increase, but here are links to a few:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10225668/>

<https://pttcnetwork.org/news/evidence-based-strategies-to-decrease-alcohol-consumption/>

<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/strategies-and-solutions/what-works-for-health/strategies/alcohol-taxes>

<https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2018/12/13/18130843/alcohol-taxes>

Indiana’s alcohol tax hasn’t increased since 1981. With inflation, the beer tax is now practically worthless, and the taxes on wine and spirits have also lost much of their impact. Studies show that, just like with tobacco, raising the price of alcohol can make a big difference, especially in reducing underage drinking.

Underage drinking is a serious issue affecting communities across Indiana, and raising the alcohol tax is one effective way to address it. However, we can’t make this change without the support of our legislators. That’s why it’s important for community advocates to let their state representatives and senators know that increasing the alcohol tax can help reduce underage drinking, curb adult problem drinking, and ultimately save lives.

Raising taxes, lowers consequences!

Advocacy isn’t lobbying until there is a bill number + a clear call to action.

Everyone has the right to advocate for issues that matter to them; however, if you're unsure about what's permissible at your workplace, it's best to engage in advocacy during your personal time using your own devices.

Before starting any advocacy campaign, always consult with your legal counsel to ensure that you’re complying with relevant laws and policies.

For further details on the distinctions between advocacy and lobbying, as well as guidelines on workplace policies, you can check resources from organizations like the National Council of Nonprofits and the IRS.

Here are some of helpful links:

- www.icrud.org
- <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy>
- <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/lobbying>

Calling a Legislator

Some people enjoy chatting on the phone, while others would rather face a dental appointment than make a call. However, many legislators still rely on phone conversations to gather information. To make that phone call easier, here are some helpful tips:

Legislative Assistants

When you call a legislator, you'll most likely be speaking with their legislative assistant (LA). This person acts as a "gatekeeper," handling messages, emails, and meeting schedules. They play a *crucial* role in ensuring your information gets passed along and in helping you set up meetings. When introducing yourself, let them know you are a constituent (if you're calling your own legislator) and that you have some information to share.

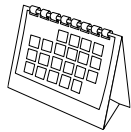


Typically, the LA will ask you to follow up with an email containing any data (the more local, the better), or personal stories you wish to share, so don't forget to ask for the best email address to use—it might be theirs or the legislator's.

If you want to speak directly to the legislator, ask if they're available. If not, you can ask to schedule a time for a conversation.

Scheduling and Attending a Meeting

You can reach out to the LA via phone or email to request a meeting. Legislators are available to meet in their home districts when they're not in session, at the statehouse, or even through platforms like Zoom—just be sure to ask for their preferred method. The LA will usually send you a meeting link, but they might also request that you provide one. If you're inviting someone else to the meeting, make sure to inform the LA in advance; it's important not to surprise the legislator with unexpected attendees.



Meeting with a legislator might feel intimidating, but remember that they are elected to serve the people. Most legislators are eager to meet with constituents and genuinely want to hear your concerns.

Here are the three most important rules to follow during your meeting:

1. Always be respectful!
2. Always be prepared!
3. Always be on time!

You are the expert!

Each session, legislators review thousands of bills and meet with countless individuals. They can't be expected to be familiar with every topic of concern, so this is your chance to educate and advocate! Even if you don't see eye to eye on an issue, it's crucial to maintain respect and professionalism and represent yourself or your organization effectively. While they might not remember every detail about you, they will definitely remember how you presented yourself during a meeting.

Here are some key points to remember for your meeting:

- **Duration:** Meetings typically last between 15 to 30 minutes
- **Participants:** Expect to meet with the legislator and possibly one or more staff members
- **Format:** Meetings are generally informal, so be ready to introduce yourself (and anyone accompanying you) along with the purpose of the meeting, and be ready to answer questions
- **Materials:** Bring one concise handout that is easy to read and not overly text-heavy- you can send any additional information via email later
- **Follow-Up:** Always follow up with a thank-you email and include any other relevant information you wish to share

Phone/Email Guide

You can communicate via email, too - just change this guide as needed for email and remember this is just a guideline, use your own words and say what is comfortable for you!

RAISING INDIANA'S ALCOHOL TAX

1 Introducing Yourself

Hello, my name is [YOUR NAME], and I would like to make a comment to Senator/Representative [NAME OF LEGISLATOR AND PLEASE LET THEM KNOW IF YOU ARE A CONSTITUENT] about Indiana's alcohol tax.

2 Purpose of the Call/Email

I'm calling/emailing to talk to Senator/Representative [NAME OF LEGISLATOR] about an increase in the alcohol tax (if the legislator isn't available, save the "reasons why" for the actual meeting). Let the LA know you can meet in district, at the statehouse, or virtually, whatever works best for the legislator.

3 Reason #1

Research shows that raising the alcohol tax can effectively reduce underage drinking and high-risk binge drinking. [THIS IS THE PLACE TO USE YOUR OWN COUNTY OR OTHER DATA REGARDING ALCOHOL].

4 Reason #2

Increasing alcohol taxes is recognized as one of the most effective public health strategies to reduce alcohol-related harm. It's an evidence based policy with years of supportive research.

5 Reason #3

Indiana's alcohol tax hasn't been raised since 1981 and our tax rates are lower than our neighboring states, as well as some of the lowest in the country.

6 Reason #4

Indiana misses out on millions of dollars of revenue every year because of the low alcohol tax. There's not enough funding to prevent and treat substance use disorders and other mental health issues. This funding would enhance and expand current efforts.

7 Provide Further Information

I urge you to visit Indiana Coalition to Reduce Underage Drinking's website for further information at www.icrud.org. I would also be more than happy to send you a fact sheet and more (local) information.

8 Signing Off

Thank you for your time. I will follow up with the more information and please let me know if you have questions. [YOUR NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION]

Testifying in Committee

RAISING INDIANA'S ALCOHOL TAX

Before testifying, check with your employer. If requested in writing, you can serve as an expert witness, but always confirm if it's allowed. You can also email your testimony or have someone else deliver it.

Anyone without an access badge must go through security screening at the main (Capitol street) or back entrance of the statehouse. Avoid bringing anything that could be seen as a weapon, like mace, a pen knife, or a sign with a pointed stake, etc.

1 Finding a Committee Meeting

Every house and senate session and every committee meeting is posted online and can be viewed live or at your convenience. To find a committee meeting you can go to <https://www.iga.in.gov> and on the right side is an "upcoming meetings" box with a scrollable calendar. If you know the committee you want to view, you can go to the top "committees" tab and find it there and watch live (or watch the recordings).

2 Signing Up to Testify

In every committee room there will be a place to sign up to testify - it could be an electronic stand outside the door, on your mobile device, or paper forms in the room. Usually the paper forms are where you can easily see them, but you might have to ask. You provide your name, organization (if you are representing one), address, phone, bill number, and if you support or oppose (you can also indicate that you are neutral and there to provide information only).

3 Finding a Seat

In many committee rooms, especially public policy, there are very few public seats. If at all possible, get to the room as early as you can (some rooms won't be open until 30 min. or less before the meeting), have someone save you a seat, or plan to stand...for a while.

4 Waiting...

A lot of things can delay (or cancel) a committee so be prepared and available to wait if necessary (that's when the seat is especially important!). A delay is a good time to review your testimony again.

5 Your Turn

The committee chair will usually call the names of those who have signed up to testify, in no particular order. Some chairs call all supporters first, some call all opposed first, and some call one opposed and then one support. And some chairs call in the order they are submitted.

6 How to Start

Though the chair has just called your name and (usually) organization, always give that information again and then thank the chairperson and committee members for hearing the issue.

7 Your Testimony

The two most important rules for testimony - **be factual and be brief!** Some chairpersons will set a limit of 3 minutes, some have no stated limit, but a good rule of thumb is 5 minutes or less. Provide applicable personal experiences, data, and state your reason for supporting (or not) the bill being discussed. Thank the committee again for their time.

8 Questioning

It might seem intimidating but you might get questions during or after your testimony. If you don't know the answer, it's fine to say "I don't have that information but I can get it to you" or simply "I don't know". NEVER make something up just to provide an answer and also make sure you do follow up.

Indiana's Alcohol Tax

Raise Taxes, Lower Consequences

BEER TAX

IN: \$0.115

IL: \$0.23

KY: \$0.93

MI: \$0.20

OH: \$0.18

Lower than our neighbors!
(#43 out of 50)

WINE TAX

IN: \$2.68

IL: \$8.55

KY: \$9.46

MI: \$13.55

OH: \$11.37

Lower than our neighbors!
(#44 out of 50)

DISTILLED SPIRITS TAX

IN: \$0.47

IL: \$1.39

KY: \$3.23

MI: \$0.51

OH: \$0.32

Lower than our neighbors
except Ohio! (#36 out of 50)

Indiana's alcohol tax hasn't been raised in 43 years! It's time to raise the tax for the health of Hoosiers!



DATA SOURCE: <https://taxfoundation.org/location/indiana/> and IN DOR