



Colleges Critical of Alcohol Abuse Bill

Schools cite need for discretion in deciding discipline

By Jan Murphy
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As state lawmakers consider a bill aimed at curbing alcohol abuse on college campuses, they are facing resistance from Pennsylvania's colleges and universities.

"It does surprise me they'd come out in opposition to it," said state Rep. Jerry Nailor, R-Mechanicsburg, a co-sponsor of the bill. "I genuinely felt I was doing something to assist them in their effort to deal with a serious problem."

House Bill 2375 is expected to come up for a vote in the state House this week. The bill would require colleges to institute alcohol policies and imposes penalties on students who violate them.

The bill would mandate counseling for first-time offenders, a year's expulsion for second-time offenders and permanent expulsion for three-time offenders.

As a result of opposition from higher-education lobbyists, an amendment will be offered to remove those sanctions from the bill.

However, the bill is expected to retain a penalty that makes a second-time offender no longer eligible for state-funded grants and scholarships.

College and university spokesmen said the financial aid ineligibility is severe, but they are more concerned about having their discretion taken away in deciding punishment.

"As educators who are studying, researching and feeling the negative impact of dangerous drinking, we think we are in the best position to craft a response that best suits the circumstances our school faces," said Bill Mahon, a spokesman for Penn State University. "I'm sure other institutions feel the same way."

Donald Godwin, dean of students at Marywood University in Scranton, said opposition to the sanctions in the bill might send a mixed message from colleges, given their stated concern about the problem of underage drinking.

"But I think the real issue here is what they are proposing is somewhat draconian in nature," Godwin said.

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