

OLCC may expand the rules for alcohol purchase in theaters

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PORTLAND — The Oregon Liquor Control Commission is under pressure from movie theater operators to develop a universal policy on allowing cinemas to sell beer and wine during films.

So-called "theater brewpubs," like those of the McMenamins chain, are already allowed to do so, and now chains like Regal Cinemas want to be able to follow suit at some of their theaters.

The liquor agency's current policy is to evaluate applications from movie houses on a case-by-case basis. That bothers OLCC director Teresa Kaiser, who told The Oregonian that she is uncomfortable with the lack of specific guidelines governing drinking in theater pubs.

"I don't think kids plus alcohol and darkness is a good idea," Kaiser said.

Agency staff members drafted a proposed rule change that would have allowed movie pubs to sell beer and wine, but only if minors were seated separately from drinking adults while watching a film.

But operators of licensed movie houses, including Brian

McMenamin of the McMenamins chain of movie houses, protested, saying the change would unfairly separate children from parents who wished to have a drink.

So, Kaiser decided to start over. The agency will convene a roundtable group in June to study how to regulate the practice.

Parents and other opponents of underage drinking say they are alarmed by the possibility that

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MIKE ROACH | Father of a 14-year old girl

Regal Cinemas, and to the extent they see it, it sort of sanitizes the consumption," said Mike Roach, father of a 14-year-old girl.

McMenamin, who launched his first theater pub in Portland with his brother Mike nearly 20 years ago, said his company's policy is to admit children with their parents or legal guardians for showings before 6 p.m., which often are geared toward families.

Parents do not come to drink, said Pete Boicourt, film buyer for McMenamins theaters, but it's a nice option to accompany the pizza or pasta they eat while watching a movie.

alcohol could be served in mall multiplexes.

Young people "don't expect to see beer sold at

New bill to require proof of citizenship for license

SALEM — A bill to bar illegal immigrants from getting Oregon drivers' licenses was narrowly approved by a House panel Monday.

The measure, which now goes to the House Budget Committee, would require proof of citizenship or legal residence to obtain a license and is meant to comply with a White House-backed bill passed by Congress this month.

The federal measure says states must require proof of U.S. citizenship, such as a Social Security number, or other evidence of legal residence to get a license.

States, which have three years to comply, are allowed to give special driving permits to people without proof of legal residence, but the documents wouldn't be accepted as identification by airport authorities or other federal agencies.

The bill passed 4-3 by the Oregon House Transportation Committee would prohibit illegal immigrants from obtaining any driving privileges. Some committee members objected because they wanted to provide special driving cards to people without proof of citizenship.

Critics have argued that the federal law and the House bill would not stop illegal immigrants from driving — it would only make them drive without a license or insurance. Moreover, opponents contend, the rules would hurt the agriculture industry, which depends on migrant workers for temporary labor.

But supporters of the bill say it will help keep terrorists from obtaining licenses, which can then be used to obtain other documents and board airplanes.

Rep. George Gilman, R-Medford, said he favored the bill because he thought it had a better chance of passing the House and it brought the state into compliance with the federal law early.

Terry Beyer, D-Springfield, voted against the bill, saying she feared it would "drive a problem a little deeper underground, as opposed to solving one."

Few businesses willing to support civil unions bill

SALEM — So far, very few of Oregon's large businesses have staked out a public position on whether the state should allow same-sex couples to form civil unions, a bill that would require employers to extend health insurance, family leave and other benefits to gay couples.

Among the state's larger companies, only Powell's Books Inc. and Norm Thompson Outfitters Inc. have endorsed Senate Bill 1000.

But businesses are under heavy pressure from advocates of the bill to support the legislation because of hopes that backing the bill could improve its chance of passing, especially in the House.

The bill, sponsored by Gov. Ted Kulongoski and a bipartisan group of state senators, proposes to extend the same benefits to same-sex couples that state law offers to married couples. It also would make it illegal to discriminate based on sexual orientation in employment, housing or public services.

Ann Smith, Powell's chief operations officer, said a statewide civil unions and anti-discrimination law is "the right thing for Oregon and for our employees."

"From our perspective, it's a question of basic fairness," she said.

Meanwhile, Nike, Intel and Portland General Electric are still evaluating the bill.

"We are very supportive of the anti-discrimination provisions in the bill," Nike spokesman Vada Manager said.

But Nike executives question whether same-sex couples would no longer be taxed differently than married couples, he said.

Two major business lobbies, Associated Oregon Industries and the Oregon Business Council, have not taken a position on SB1000, which had its first hearing May 4 in the Senate Rules Committee.

Lisa Trussell, lobbyist for Associated Oregon Industries, said businesses will remain quiet unless there are significant changes affecting employers.

Several smaller companies and business owners have endorsed the bill, but others are concerned.

Steve Scheidler, president and CEO of Sure Power Industries in Tualatin, testified against the bill during the committee hearing and later said he's heard from other leaders of small businesses who also worry about increased benefits costs and becoming the target of lawsuits.

Small-business owners privately are pointing out problems with SB1000, but they "don't want to be out front on it," said Tim Nashif, political director of the Oregon Family Council, which publishes a Christian voters' guide and is waging an e-mail, mail and telephone campaign to kill the bill.

On the flip side, Nashif said, he suspects other Oregon companies favor the bill but don't want "our thousands and thousands of supporters unhappy with them."

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Joby Patterson. M-H, 14-15:50, 241 Lawrence Hall.

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Priscilla West. M-H, 16-16:50, 241 Lawrence Hall.

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