



Organization: Lee County Coalition for a Drug Free Southwest Florida in Lee County, FL
Contact: Keral Kronseder Vogt

Q: What did you change a law, a regulation, an ordinance, a policy or other?

A: Fort Myers City ordinance changed to prohibit youth under 21 from attending “concerts” in establishments serving liquor.

Q: Where did the idea to make the change originate?

A: The need for change was evident based on police department data indicating:

- Increased arrests of males under 21 years of age who were drunk and disorderly (great increase in both barroom fights and physical danger to arresting officers).
- Increased assaults because females under the age of 21 were provided alcohol by older males who later sexually assaulted them.
- Establishments bending the “concert” definition by hiring a guitar player to strum in the corner of a bar so that the event could be called a concert, thus allowing 18-21 year olds to enter the premise, resulting in increased alcohol sales.

Q: What elected or other government officials did you meet with to accomplish this change? And at what point(s) in the process did you meet with them?

A: The police chief requested that the coalition appear before the city council to support a change in ordinance. We made a strong argument, and the ordinance was changed.

Q: What materials did you use to make your case that the change was necessary and would produce the desired results?

A: We used youth alcohol use data from Florida’s bi-annual Youth Substance Abuse Survey. The statistical evidence of the problem was both undeniable and chilling.

Q: Through what system/process did you make your change?

A: The change was made through the board of city commissioners.

Q: Who were your allies in making this change?

A: Our strongest ally was the Fort Myers Police Department.

Q: Who opposed this change?

A: Bar owners opposed the change, as did young patrons who said that their rights to enjoy music were being denied.

Q: Did you testify in front of local boards or state governing bodies?

A: I testified before the Board of the Fort Myers City Commissioners. I testified regarding the need to change the ordinance.

Q: Did you participate in media advocacy to make your change?

A: Although we did not initiate media advocacy, an effective campaign was engineered by the police chief and we participated as appropriate. The issue received great media attention. Upon passage, there was a nice article in paper with a boxed quote from our executive director.

Q: Please describe in detail the outcome of your change.

A: Although the ordinance was changed to prohibit under youth under the age of 21 from attending concerts in venues serving alcohol, much negotiation ensued and the definition of concert was subsequently changed to allow youth younger than 21 to attend large venue “real concerts.” This compromise was satisfactory to most parties, except the bar owners.

Q: Any other comments about your environmental change that you wish to share.

A: Anti-drug coalitions are very fortunate in Florida because we are supported (alas, not financially) at the most senior levels of government. For instance, underage alcohol consumption is the focus of the Florida Governor’s White Paper “Changing Alcohol Norms,” which describes in detail a number of recommended changes at state and local levels. The Coalition strongly endorses the White Paper, will adopt several recommended initiatives which are appropriate to our county, and featured the White Paper at our Red Ribbon Luncheon attended by over 200 community leaders. One of the most significant White Paper recommendations is that coalitions hold joint meetings between Florida’s Drug Czar, Jim McDonough, Coalition representatives, and college presidents to take action against binge drinking by college students. Along these lines, the Coalition supports alcohol-free graduation parties and encourages parents to have alcohol-free home parties for teens.