



Organization: Rio Grande Safe Communities Coalition; El Paso, Texas

Contact: Mary Ellen Hernandez, Director

Margaret R. Bartoletti, Workplace Coordinator (Former Director)

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

A: We added a “Special Curfew Ordinance” to the existing El Paso curfew ordinance.

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

A: Underage, cross-border, binge drinking has been an on-going issue and has been seen as a right of passage along the border forever. It was identified as the number one priority for the Coalition at our 2003 retreat. The San Diego/Tijuana model program to address cross border binge drinking was chosen to be replicated through our TCADA SIG grant.

The “Special Curfew Ordinance”, which was ultimately adopted, was fashioned after the Austin, TX curfew in effect in the 6th St. college party area of Austin.

Q: What elected or other government officials did you meet with to accomplish this change?

A: We initially met with El Paso Mayor (Joe Wardy) and all the City Council Representatives, providing them with regional/local data and information, as well as information from the successful California model program. This item was placed on the Mayor’s list of priorities for our state legislative agenda.

We then sent two packets of information to each of our state legislators (one to their local office & one to their state office). This was then followed by a personal visit to their Austin, TX office by the Coalition Director (Marge Bartoletti). Ms. Bartoletti did this on her own time and at her own expense. The intention was to attempt to have a state law introduced and passed, similar to the existing California state law. Two of El Paso State Reps agreed to sponsor a bill, provided that the entire El Paso delegation supported it. When it became evident that at least one representative would not support such a law it was then decided to go back to the local level.

Personal visits were conducted again with the new El Paso Mayor (John Cook) and the newly elected City Council Representatives, in conjunction with the information packets, which were provided to each. Information was also provided to the El Paso City Attorney’s office.

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

A: We provided data collected by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE), whose team had conducted quarterly surveys on the pedestrian bridge on Friday and Saturday nights for the previous six years. We also included a copy of the California law and information on the San Diego/Tijuana model. Additionally, we also provided many news articles, letters to the editor, hospital and police data, and the results of a citywide phone survey showing a 74% support for the proposed ordinance.

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

A: We worked through the local and state legislative process and employed community mobilization strategies as well.

Q: Who were your allies in making this change?

A: We had many allies to include Coalition members, the El Paso Police and Fire Depts.; City County Health & Environmental District, whose Board drafted a resolution in support of this initiative; the El Paso County Medical Society; LULAC chapters from Texas and New Mexico; R.E. Thomason General Hospital; Las Cruces Mayor Bill Mattaice; a representative from the state of New Mexico Dept. of Traffic Safety and a pastor and physician from Juarez, MX, who testified at the final City Council meeting. We also had students and parents; local businessmen; the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce; healthcare providers; the Pan American Health Organization; the U.S. Consulate and the media.

Q: Who opposed this change?

A: The most vocal, and only opposition, that we were aware of was from one state representative and two city council reps. The one city council person, who was most vocal, abstained in the council vote and the other voted against the passage of the ordinance. We assumed that the Juarez bar owners were also in opposition, however, they did not openly oppose our efforts.

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

A: I testified before the City County Health District Board, the El Paso Medical Society and the El Paso City Council.

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

A: Yes, we had, and continue to have, a great working relationship with our local media. Coverage included interviews and follow-up to committee meetings, the youth press conference, requested personal interviews on the issues, etc. Both print and television media included articles on the ordinance. Newspaper articles appeared on the editorial page; a special TV story was aired, which included interviews with the City Representative, the Project Coordinator and me. We also had two large billboards posted along I 10, which is the major freeway going through El Paso. One was on the Westside and the other on the eastside. The billboard became very controversial and created a bi-national issue as a result of misinformation provided by the City Council rep who opposed the proposed ordinance.

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

A: As a result of the passage of the “Special Curfew Ordinance” we have been informed, and our bridge counts indicate, that there has been a reduction in the numbers of underage youth walking across the pedestrian bridge into Juarez, MX. We also believe that we have been the catalyst for the recent curfew that was initiated in Juarez, MX. Over the summer. The curfew named “Despues de las 10 en casa major” requires that children up to, and including, the age of 10 be accompanied by a parent if out on the street after 10:00pm every night of the week. 11p.m. is the curfew time for youth between the ages of 11 – 18. The curfew is intended to keep juveniles safe but has faced criticism stating that it is unconstitutional.