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Tax increase on Kansas liquor would help disabled, mentally ill programs

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TOPEKA | Kansans would pay a few more cents for every beer or glass of wine to support programs for the disabled and mentally ill under legislation reviewed Friday by state lawmakers.

The bill would double an existing tax on wholesale alcohol, which is passed along to the consumer in the price of beer, wine and liquor. It's one of several tax increases being considered by lawmakers looking to close a \$400 million budget deficit.

The current tax rate — unchanged since 1977 — is 18 cents for every gallon of beer, 30 cents for a gallon of wine and \$2.50 for a gallon of liquor.

The estimated \$21.8 million in additional revenue would be split evenly between mental health programs and services for the developmentally disabled. Lawmakers have cut funding for both since the state's financial crisis began.

The legislation received a hearing in the House Tax Committee.

Two Johnson County lawmakers, Rep. Kay Wolf, a Prairie Village Republican, and Rep. Pat Colloton, a Leawood Republican, came up with the idea.

"We are hurting the very people who need our help the most," Wolf said.

The state has cut more than \$20 million in grants to community mental health centers, and reductions to programs for the disabled have put more than 4,000 Kansans on waiting lists for services.

Lobbyists for liquor distributors and bars, as well as liquor store owners, urged lawmakers Friday to oppose the tax proposal. They predicted it would hurt sales and prompt Kansans living near the state line to shop in Missouri.