

Tougher drunk-driving legislation 'targets the wrong people'

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Opposition from the hospitality industry is mounting against Alberta's Bill 26, says the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association.

The industry group said Monday it has received more than 2,000 signatures on petitions from Alberta business owners, their employees and customers who are concerned the province's new drinking and driving legislation "targets the wrong people."

It provided one-signature petition cards for its members, and the response has taken off in just over a week, said CRFA president and CEO Garth Whyte.

"It's a very difficult group to mobilize," he said.

The petitions will be sent to Premier Alison Redford, Transportation Minister Ray Danyluk and MLAs.

"It smacks of the HST when they pushed it through for political reasons and no consultation. We've been trying to forewarn them that there's going to be an issue with this and talk to us so we can work together.

"We have the same objectives. We want to get impaired drivers off the road, but this is a grey area. It's not dealing with impaired citizens. It's going to create a lot of uncertainty."

The Alberta government's proposed legislation would impose some of the strictest administrative penalties in the country on drivers who have been drinking.

For drivers who record a blood-alcohol level between .05 and .08, which is not a Criminal Code viola-

tion, the province currently allows police to impose a 24-hour licence suspension. The new legislation would increase that to an automatic three-day suspension and a three-day vehicle seizure for a first offence.

"What we don't support are the stricter penalties for drivers with a blood-alcohol content from .05 to .08," Whyte said. "This piece of the legislation affects responsible drivers who are not legally impaired, and is unnecessarily confusing and intimidating to ordinary Albertans."

Whyte said when stricter laws were introduced in British Columbia, a CRFA survey found sales at licensed restaurants and bars fell 21 per cent.

Alberta's \$8.4-billion restaurant industry, which employs more than 125,000 people, would also suffer losses and job cuts, he said.