

Time to close liquor outlets tied to crime

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It's no secret there is significant violence and criminal activity in Baltimore. The fact that some of this violence and criminal activity centers in and around retail alcoholic outlets is absolutely no secret to the people who live near them and deal with the consequences daily.

House Bill 965, introduced by Del. Nick Mosby of District 40, would allow the Board of Liquor License Commissioners for Baltimore City to immediately suspend a liquor license if it determines that there was an act of violence that results in the death or serious bodily injury that occurred in or immediately adjacent to the licensed premises. This legislation is an absolute necessity to protect the public living in the surrounding community and to ensure the operations of a license holder did not contribute to the violent act that led to serious injury and death.

This bill is a common-sense approach to addressing the increasing number of violent incidents we are seeing in and around alcoholic outlets. Suspension of a license is not mandatory but would be available to the liquor board when there are questions surrounding the events that precipitated the violent incident. Was it a drug deal gone bad and was drug dealing taking place in or at the entrance to the bar or liquor store? Why was a 17-year-old in a bar at 1:40 a.m. and what led to the multiple stabbings that occurred in that bar? What conditions led to the shooting death of a patron in a Fells Point pub?

Police do not typically focus on the role played by the retail outlet or bar in the incident. We need liquor inspectors to investigate the incident quickly, questioning the license holder and those with direct knowledge of the incident to develop findings that can be presented to the board.

Without this immediate action, the information is lost, and we are left without answers to some very important questions. Our fire and health departments are authorized to shut down the operations of a business if they believe there is a danger to the public. The liquor board should have the same authority and this should be considered an integral part of the city's violence reduction strategy.

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