



*The Baltimore Good Neighbors Coalition, a fiscally sponsored project of Strong City Baltimore, is a network of community members and neighborhood associations working to support evidence-based alcohol policies to reduce alcohol-related harm in Baltimore City.*

### **TESTIMONY**

**For:** Delegates of Baltimore City

**From:** The Baltimore Good Neighbors Coalition (POC: Barbara Valeri, 10 E. Lee Street, Unit 1508, Baltimore MD 21202)

**Subject:** Support for HB509: Baltimore City – Alcoholic Beverages Licenses – Grounds for Suspension

On behalf of the Baltimore Good Neighbors Coalition (BGNC), an organization that advocates for alcohol policies in Baltimore City, and/or statewide policies with local implications, that will protect the public’s health, safety and quality of life, we ask for your support of HB509.

I am a long-time resident of the 46<sup>th</sup> Legislative District of Baltimore City and have worked with community associations in Federal Hill, Otterbein and the Southern Peninsula for a number of years on issues relating to liquor licensing, public safety and crime prevention. I also participate, on behalf of BGNC, in assisting other communities in their cases before the Liquor Board as they fight to combat the blight caused by problem liquor outlets. As residents and supporters of Baltimore, we share the same objective – we want safe, healthy and vibrant communities where families and businesses can thrive.

It is widely understood and accepted that alcohol is a significant contributor to violent crime. We also know that there are alcohol outlets in the city where incidents of death or serious bodily injury have occurred. The Liquor Board does not currently have the means to act quickly to assess violent incidents, gather relevant information, and make timely decisions that will protect the public and help prevent future tragedies. HB509 provides the authority needed by the Liquor Board to take prudent and appropriate action when dealing with incidents of violence in which liquor outlets are involved.

This bill provides the Executive Secretary of the Liquor Board with great latitude in making an initial determination of whether or not there is sufficient reason to suspend a license. The bill also requires that a hearing on the suspension be held within a very short time after the suspension is imposed. These provisions protect the interests of the both the community and the licensee.

What we see today is a situation where either no violation is issued to a liquor establishment where a violent act has occurred or where a violation has been issued with little or no personal investigation by Liquor Board staff. If a violation is issued, the hearing generally occurs weeks or possibly months later and by that time a "collective amnesia" seems to develop on the part of the licensee and manager about what occurred, i.e., "nobody remembers seeing anything". In one event involving a multiple stabbing by an underage person at a tavern in Federal Hill, absolutely no information was provided at the hearing to explain what happened the night of the incident. The civil law-suits brought by the multiple stabbing victims will come to trial in March 2020 and we might, finally, have insight into the events that caused that tragedy.

However, the latest example involves a liquor establishment on West Pratt Street where a homicide occurred inside the business in November 2019 and another death occurred one month later (December 2019) when a person was shot multiple times in front of the business after an altercation that occurred inside the premises. Adding to this alarming chain of events, the police arrested an individual inside the premises for illegal possession of a firearm in January 2020. From what we have been able to determine, there was no immediate investigation completed of the incidents by the Liquor Board staff and the violations hearing for all of these incidents of violence is scheduled for February 6<sup>th</sup>. We need a better process for dealing with and preventing alcohol outlet-related violent crime.

Our fire and health departments are authorized to shut down the operations of a business if they believe that there is a danger to the public. The Liquor Board should have the same authority to suspend operations when violent acts occur in or around liquor establishments. This absolutely must be part of the city's violence reduction strategy. Other states utilize this tool, including our neighbor Virginia, to great effect. We need to follow their example.

We respectfully urge you to support HB509.

Sincerely,

Barbara Valeri, BGNC Leadership Team

