



Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy *Vision:* Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

HB 356 Prince George's County – Alcoholic Beverages – Licenses for Supermarkets

Hearing Date: 2/21/22

Committee: Economic Matters

Position: Unfavorable

Thank you, Chairman Wilson, Vice-chair Crosby, and members of the Economic Matters Committee for holding this hearing on HB 356, which would allow the Prince George's County Liquor Board to issue up to three beer and light wine licenses per legislative district in areas that qualify as food deserts or food swamps. The Maryland Public Health Association's Alcohol & Tobacco Network urges an unfavorable report on this bill.

MdPHA is deeply disappointed and more than a little confused on how expanding access to alcohol can be promoted as a solution to food insecurity. Many of our members have worked on numerous bills and/or community projects to both address food deserts and food swamps over the years, legislation and interventions stemming from scientific study and evaluation. We feel the frustration, inequity, and pain stemming from these incredibly difficult issues. Much of the research can be seen coming from our own experts at academic centers such as University of Maryland, Towson, and Johns Hopkins or from community advocacy organizations working to increase urban farms; strengthen nutrition standards in public schools; or require only milk, water, or 100% juice instead of soda in kids' meals.

It is unclear from this legislation how the Prince George's County Council defines a food desert or food swamp, but increasing alcohol outlet density and access is not the solution. Research consistently demonstrates that under resourced communities are both more likely to qualify as a food desert or swamp¹ in addition to being oversaturated with alcohol outlets.²³ Additionally, these outlets are often associated with violent crime, which is also a concerning issue for under resourced communities. Research based on Baltimore City actually demonstrated the opposite: reducing alcohol outlet density was associated with a reduction in violent crime.⁴

We also point out that there are at least three additional bills in PG County that look to expand access through days of sales or number of licenses. It is important to consider the entirety of the alcohol environment as a whole and the impact that increasing density on multiple levels at the same time could have.

While we are fully in support of increased healthy food options in areas like food deserts and food swamps, tying this directly to alcohol sales is not the solution.

For these reasons, we urge an unfavorable report on HB 356.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in

healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

¹ Robert Emmet Jones, Tobin N. Walton, Sylvia Duluc-Silva & J. Mark Fly (2021): Household Food Insecurity in an Urban Food Desert: A Descriptive Analysis of an African American Community, *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, DOI: 10.1080/19320248.2021.1926390

² Trangenstein, P.J., Gray, C., Rossheim, M.E. *et al.* Alcohol Outlet Clusters and Population Disparities. *J Urban Health* 97, 2020:123–136 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-019-00372-2>

³ Juliet P. Lee, William Ponicki, Christina Mair, Paul Gruenewald, Lina Ghanem. What explains the concentration of off-premise alcohol outlets in Black neighborhoods?, *SSM-Population Health*, 12; 2020, 100669, ISSN 2352-8273, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2020.100669>.

⁴ Trangenstein, PJ, Eck RH, et al. The violence prevention potential of reducing alcohol outlet access in Baltimore, Maryland." *JSAD* 81.1 (2020): 24-33.