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TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL 854
Alcoholic Beverages - Class A License - Food Retailers
Finance Committee, February 24, 2023

Senate Bill 854 will significantly increase the number of locations where alcohol will be sold in Maryland. With already stretched budgets for enforcement of all alcohol laws, local agencies tasked with preventing alcohol sales to minors will simply be unable to keep up with the additional licensed locations. Less risk of a compliance check means that retailers will be more willing to risk alcohol sales to minors. Moreover, the locations that would be able to sell alcohol under Senate Bill 854 are, unlike traditional liquor stores, locations where teens and youth frequently go to purchase candy, chips, and other sundries.

Therefore, the most pressing public health concern stemming from Senate Bill 854 is the potential for an increase in underage access to alcoholic beverages. The Centers for Disease Control links underage drinking to a multitude of issues including: higher rates of school absences and lower grades; unprotected sexual activity; disruption of normal growth and brain development; physical and sexual violence; increased risk of suicide and homicide; alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes and other unintentional injuries, such as burns, falls, or drowning; misuse of other substances; and alcohol poisoning.¹ People who use alcohol when they are young are more likely to develop alcohol dependency later in life.²

Senate Bill 854 creates a new avenue for underage persons to access alcoholic beverages, without providing needed resources or strategies necessary to conduct youth-access enforcement operations. For this reason, we ask for an unfavorable report.

This testimony is submitted by the Public Health Law Clinic at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law and may not represent the position of the School of Law; the University of Maryland, Baltimore; or the University of Maryland System.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/underage-drinking.htm>; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office of the Surgeon General. *Facing addiction in America: The Surgeon General's report on alcohol, drugs, and health*, Washington, DC: HHS, 2016.; Miller JW, Naimi TS, Brewer RD, Jones SE. *Binge drinking and associated health risk behaviors among high school students*. *Pediatrics* 2007;119:76–85.; Esser MB, Guy GP, Zhang K, Brewer RD. *Binge drinking and prescription opioid misuse in the U.S., 2012-2014*. *Am J Prev Med* 2019;57,197-208.;

² Buchmann AF, Schmid B, Blomeyer D, et al. *Impact of age at first drink on vulnerability to alcohol-related problems: Testing the marker hypothesis in a prospective study of young adults*. *J Psychiatr Res* 2009;43:1205-1212.