



Troy D. Berry
Sheriff

Office of the Sheriff

Charles County, Maryland

Headquarters
6915 Crain Hwy - P.O. Box 189
La Plata, Maryland 20646-0189
301-609-6400



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February 23, 2023

Honorable Senator Melony Griffith
Chair, Finance Committee

Honorable Members of the Finance Committee

RE: SB 519 – Charles County – Alcoholic Beverages – Unlicensed Establishments

Dear Senator Griffith:

The Charles County Sheriff's Office supports SB 519 entitled, Charles County – Alcoholic Beverages-Unlicensed Establishment. The bill amends Alcoholic Beverages § 18-2501(a) by removing the “live entertainment” provision as it relates to unlicensed establishments.

Currently Maryland law prohibits an unlicensed establishment from allowing the consumption of alcohol on their premises. However, in Charles County, this only applies to unlicensed establishments that offer or provide live entertainment. There is no law to prohibit a commercial type business that does not offer or provide live entertainment from encouraging and allowing its customers to bring and consume alcohol within the establishment. This practice allows these establishments or venues to avoid obtaining alcohol related licenses and permits. Traditionally, these establishments are referred to as “bottle clubs.”

The Sheriff's Office frequently responds to complaints about bottle clubs in our community. When responding to these establishments, officers find themselves encountering assaults, drunken driving, disorderly conduct, drug activity, sales of illegal or “moonshine” alcohol, and, on one occasion, a homicide. Nearby businesses and their customers are being impacted as the illegal and unsafe activity often spreads from the unlicensed business to the parking lot and immediate area. Because there is no live entertainment, alcohol consumption at these establishments is not prohibited and a license is not required, the owners of the establishments have little incentive to control the behavior.

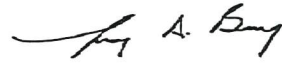
Removing “live entertainment” will either encourage the establishment to obtain an alcohol license and comply with the requirements set forth in the law or stop the events. Establishments with alcohol licenses are required to take important steps to protect public safety, including closing at 2:00 a.m., preventing underage drinking, and server education and training. Licensed establishments must also undergo inspections to make sure the premises are safe and the alcohol related rules are followed.

Ten other jurisdictions currently have statutes that prohibit alcoholic beverages at unlicensed establishments, regardless of whether or not there is live entertainment. SB 519 will put Charles County in a similar position.¹

¹ The other jurisdictions are Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Calvert County, Cecil County, Dorchester County, Harford County, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and St. Mary's County.

For these reasons, the Charles County Sheriff's Office requests a favorable report on SB 519. Thank you for your attention to this important bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Troy D. Berry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Troy D. Berry
Sheriff