



MDDCSAM is the Maryland state chapter of the American Society of Addiction Medicine whose members are physicians and other health providers who treat people with substance use disorders.

SB 763 (HB 996). Alcoholic Beverages – Class A Licenses – Retail Grocery Establishments (Healthy Food Accountability Act of 2021)

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. March 5, 2021

OPPOSE

The high density of alcohol sales establishments in low income communities is a well-recognized public health problem. Public health advocates and researchers have worked to reduce the density of alcohol establishments in low income areas, but this bill would exacerbate the problem.

This bill would pre-empt local authority over siting and regulation of alcohol sales, which would further increase public health harms. Tobacco and alcohol industries have tried for years to undermine local authority regarding tobacco and alcohol sales, and these efforts have been appropriately resisted by public health advocates. **Local control is a well-known component of preventing harms associated with these products.**

Alcohol is the fourth leading cause of preventable death in the U.S. and causes double the number of deaths annually than opioids do.

Although the bill attempts to address a public health problem, food desserts, **it is not supported by public health organizations, or organizations that are concerned about food desserts.**

Increasing the prevalence of one public health problem is not an appropriate approach to addressing another public health problem. We are not aware of any evidence that increasing alcohol sales in food establishments would reduce either food deserts or obesity. **States and localities that allow alcohol sales in food establishments appear to have similar problems with food deserts and obesity.**

As written, the bill would not result in increasing the number of food establishments in low income areas permitted to sell alcohol. But even if it were re-written to accomplish this purpose, this would not result in the reduction of food desserts. There would be an overall negative impact on public health.

We request an unfavorable report.
