



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

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**HB 858 Alcoholic Beverages – Class A Licenses – Retail Grocery Establishments**

**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 858, which would allow local liquor licensing boards to issue Class A beer or beer/wine licenses to retail establishments that meet certain requirements in terms of types of products, SNAP acceptance, size, and locations. The Maryland Public Health Association’s Alcohol & Tobacco Network urges an unfavorable report on this bill.

There are at least three issues here, as we see it.

Issuing licenses like this from the state would lead to a massive increase in licenses in a short time period. Research consistently demonstrates that increased alcohol outlet density, especially for off-premise outlets (i.e., those who sell unopened containers), is associated with an increase in a number of harms, including violence, criminal activity, domestic violence, and child maltreatment. It is also very costly; a recent study in Baltimore City demonstrated that alcohol-related harms cost \$582 million each year, almost 40% of which the government is responsible for. Alcohol consumption has been steadily rising nationally, especially for women and minorities; as consumption rises, so do alcohol-related harms.

Maryland’s existing regulatory and enforcement structure for retail alcohol sales is primarily at the local level, with liquor boards in the 23 counties, City of Baltimore, and City of Annapolis issuing licenses, providing education and other training materials, enforcing the laws, and adjudicating violations through administrative action. This bill attempts to circumvent this local authority in regulating the alcohol environment. It also goes a step further and preempts local requirements in Division II related to residency, voter registration, or taxpayer status.

In legislation passed in 2019, the Alcohol and Tobacco Commission was tasked with “the development of a public health impact statement for all changes to the state alcoholic beverages law...”. A statewide bill like this should be subject to such a statement to scientifically and expertly evaluate the impact on existing businesses, communities, local liquor boards, and public health and safety. To do otherwise would be irresponsible.

For these reasons, we urge an unfavorable report on HB 858.

*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.*