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Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.  
Commissioner

January 22, 2024

Senator Hickman, Chair  
Representative Supica, Chair  
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 2088, *An Act to Change the Number of Agency Liquor Stores Allowed in Certain Municipalities*

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information in opposition to LD 2088, *An Act to Change the Number of Agency Liquor Stores Allowed in Certain Municipalities*.

LD 2088 seeks to increase from six to seven the number of agency liquor stores the Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Bureau of Alcoholic Beverages and Lottery Operations (BABLO) may license in a municipality with a population over 10,000 but less than 15,001. BABLO is authorized to issue one additional agency liquor store license in a municipality with a population of less than 10,000, considering the impact of seasonal population or tourism and other related information. The bill allows BABLO to issue one additional agency liquor store license in a municipality with a population of less than 15,000.

Current law authorizes BABLO to regulate the beverage alcohol industry to ensure responsible business practice while balancing public health protections. Limited capacity in the State for compliance enforcement is a challenge for regulators, from the local level up to the licensing authority. Maine's experience shows that recent law changes that lessen regulations have resulted in additional challenges for ensuing compliance and public health and safety. Maine's prevention network remains committed to preventing and reducing substance abuse and related problems by providing leadership, available funding, education, and support to community and school populations throughout the State.

The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) supports the licensing restrictions in Maine's liquor laws that align with the US CDC's recommendation to limit alcohol outlet density to reduce the environmental factor for excessive drinking. Increases in a population's access to alcohol has been shown to increase alcohol consumption, binge drinking and their related harms. A 2009 systematic review of 44 studies of alcohol outlet density found that the most frequently investigated alcohol-related harm was violent crime, especially assault<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Popova S, Giesbrecht N, Bekmuradov D, Patra J. Hours and days of sale and density of alcohol outlets: impacts on alcohol consumption and damage: a systematic review. *Alcohol Alcohol* 2009;44:500–16. 10.1093/alcalc/agg054.

The majority of these studies were from the US. High outlet densities were associated with higher rates of assault, self-reported injuries, motor vehicle accidents, and high rates of pedestrian collisions.

This increase in alcohol use is not just felt by adults who regularly use alcohol – it has also been shown to increase consumption by minors, and by those in recovery from alcohol use disorder. According to the 2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, more than one third of Maine’s high school students thought there was no risk or slight risk to having one to two drinks of alcohol nearly every day. As many as one in five high school students drank alcohol in the last 30 days, and close to 63% said it would be sort of easy or very easy to get alcohol if they wanted it. An increase in alcohol use in Maine is also a concern especially where Maine already has one of the highest rates in the nation for binge drinking. We also know that alcohol use leads to health concerns such as chronic illness. Nearly 4% of cancers diagnosed worldwide in 2020 can be attributed to alcohol consumption, according to the World Health Organization. In the United States alone, about 75,000 cancer cases and 19,000 cancer deaths are estimated to be linked to alcohol each year.

Thank you for your time and consideration today. The Maine CDC opposes increasing the number of agency liquor stores licenses permitted in our smaller municipalities. Higher outlet density has shown to be associated with negative health and social outcomes including increased emergency room visits, alcohol-related diseases, domestic violence, and child abuse. We hope that in addition to weighing the potential economic benefits, that the social and public health impacts of increased access to alcohol are also considered.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions during your deliberation of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr. Puthiery Va', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Puthiery Va, Director  
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
Department of Health and Human Services

Bibliography of Sources to Accompany Testimony Letter for LD 2088  
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