



# Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine

## *The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers*

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

### Testimony in Opposition to LD 1751

## An Act To Make Permanent the Changes to the Liquor Laws Made by Public Law 2021, Chapters 3 and 91

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Good morning Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. I am Malory Shaughnessy, a resident of Westbrook, and the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services.

On behalf of the 35 members of the Alliance, I am here today to speak in opposition to LD 1751, "An Act To Make Permanent the Changes to the Liquor Laws Made by Public Law 2021, Chapters 3 and 91."

This bill would make permanent the pandemic-related provisions that allow qualified retailers to sell beer, wine, and cocktails for off-premise consumption and for home delivery of alcohol with a food order. These provisions were made to support businesses during the pandemic, at a time when inside gathering was prohibited and emergency waivers were needed to sustain these businesses in operation. However, to make these provisions permanent will have long term public health impacts and will negatively impact enforcement of underage drinking.

The unintended consequences of increased ease of access to alcohol are great and impact both youth and adults, especially those struggling to stay in recovery from Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD).

In Maine, data show that alcohol is the substance most often used across the lifespan, especially in youth and young adults. According to recent survey data, nearly one third (32.4%) of Maine people ages 18-25 years report binge drinking in the past 30 days – one of the highest rates in the nation<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, 1 in 2 high school students feel it is easy to get alcohol. High school students that thought alcohol was easy to obtain were nearly 4x as likely to drink alcohol within the past month<sup>2</sup>.

Currently, Maine has five liquor enforcement agents to cover the entire state. The national average of Liquor Enforcement Agents/Officers to outlets is 1 agent for every 557 outlets yet in Maine, enforcement agents are responsible for more than double that number of outlets.

**The most common types of complaints from states that have conducted compliance checks on home delivery include:** Alcohol left on doorstep; delivered to minor; did not check ID; checked ID but provided alcohol anyways; delivery driver swiped own ID to bypass the system; or driver did not know alcohol was in the order.

**Is this ease of access what we want for our children?**

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention & Maine Department of Education. 2019. Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey.

And the impact on adults is also apparent. National study data show 32% of participants reported binge drinking during stay-at-home orders, with 60% of those indicating they increased alcohol consumption during the pandemic. Non-binge drinkers increased their consumption by 28%<sup>3</sup>.

We know that ease of access to alcohol can be detrimental to those among us struggling to stay in recovery for AUD. Alcohol is already readily available for purchase in grocery stores and convenience stores, why continue the expanded ease of access? Does it need to be available in every form, everywhere?

We also know that getting into treatment for AUD is not that easy to do in Maine these days. There are waiting lists for treatment, and our medically monitored withdrawal centers have been forced to close their doors for weeks several times during the pandemic due to lack of staff and medical personnel. What are we prioritizing?

**Alcohol-related deaths in Maine are up 28 percent in 2020 over 2019. Do we want to see this continue?**

Please do not send the wrong message, please do not continue this expansions of access. Thank you.

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*With 35 members, the **Alliance** is the state association for Maine's communitybased mental health and substance use treatment providers. The **Alliance** advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system. All Mainers should have full access to the continuum of recovery-oriented systems of care for mental illness and substance use disorder –from prevention through treatment and into peer recovery support.*

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<sup>3</sup> Weerakoon SM, Jetelina KK, Knell G. (2020). Longer time spent at home during COVID-19 pandemic is associated with binge drinking among US adults. The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse; 47(1):98-106.