

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Regina Vidaver

**From:** Felice Borisy-Rudin, JD, Ph.D., Wisconsin Alcohol Policy Project

**Date:** 06/05/2024

**Re:** Effectiveness of Placing Geographic Limitations on Where New Class A Licensed Premises may be Located as a Strategy for Reducing Excessive Alcohol Use and Alcohol-Related Harms

**Issue:** How would a proposed ordinance placing geographic limitations on new Class A off-premises alcohol licenses be anticipated to impact public health and safety?

**Brief Answer:** Violence, injury, and underage drinking is greater when alcohol is abundant and available for off-premises consumption, such as in situations where there is a high density of Class A off-premises alcohol retail outlets. Reducing the density of Class A off-premises outlets can decrease violence, injury, and underage drinking. Placing a moratorium on new liquor stores in areas near facilities that serve children, people with developmental disabilities, unhoused people, and people in treatment for mental illness or substance use, could improve the public health of some of the city's most vulnerable populations.

**Background:** The effects of alcohol outlet density and violence, injury, and underage drinking have been extensively studied, with evidence from many countries, including the United States. Thomas Babor, *et al.* have summarized the effectiveness of various policies to reduce alcohol consumption and alcohol related problems in their book, *ALCOHOL NO ORDINARY COMMODITY*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Regarding outlet density, they summarize, "Major changes to outlet density . . . clearly affect consumption and harm rates. Evidence for gradual changes . . . is strongest for violence."<sup>i</sup> Restricting the spatial availability of alcohol is "consistently associated with reductions in both alcohol use and alcohol-related problems."<sup>i</sup>

**Analysis:** Increased Class A off-premises alcohol outlet density is associated with increased underage drinking, increased assaults, street violence, domestic (and intimate partner) violence, motor vehicle crashes, and other forms of injury.<sup>ii</sup> The size of the outlets may also be a factor, as places that sell large quantities of alcohol are also associated with increases in consumption, injury, and violence.<sup>iii</sup>

Multiple studies have shown that the more alcohol is available in a neighborhood, the more adolescents consume alcohol.<sup>iv</sup> A key study showed that for every 10% increase in overall alcohol outlet density there was a 17% increase in the odds that a teenager would drink alcohol the next year.<sup>v</sup> In other words, the more alcohol outlets there are in a community, the more teens drink. One effective way to keep the number of alcohol outlets low and allow reduction by attrition is to not grant licenses for new alcohol outlets. The proposed ordinance would

effectively prohibit new Class A licenses for liquor stores and gas station/convenience stores in areas within 1,320 feet of facilities that provide services for unhoused individuals, facilities that provide mental health or substance use treatment, and public parks. With time and attrition, the ordinance may result in reduced numbers of Class A off-premises retail alcohol outlets in Madison.

Off-premises alcohol outlets tend to be crime generators. Reducing the number of off-premises retail alcohol outlets reduces violence. There are several reasons for this:

- One is that “Reducing supply by restricting physical availability will increase effort to obtain alcohol, and thereby reduce total volume consumed as well as alcohol-related problems.”<sup>vi</sup>
- Another is that alcohol is a pharmacologically psychoactive beverage that dulls the reflexes and disinhibits behavior – which makes people both more likely to offend and to be victimized, thereby increasing the likelihood of accidents, violence, and injury. Reducing its availability reduces its use, and thereby reduces the violence and injury associated with it, such as motor vehicle crashes, falls, domestic violence, and other assaults.
- A third reason is that alcohol stores provide places where people can congregate, attract people from outside communities who are not interested in caring for the community where they are shopping or who may be looking for opportunities for criminal activity, and at the same time do not provide “guardians” who can supervise the drinking. Prof. Alexandra Snowden, who works at Marquette University, writes:

Off-premise alcohol outlets may serve as crime attractors that bring to these premises the motivated offenders in search of vulnerable targets in places that lack capable guardians. In the context of off-premise alcohol outlets, the guardianship over vulnerable targets is limited as the patrons’ visits to the outlets typically last just long enough to purchase the product. . . . Some off-premise alcohol outlets may specialize in the sale of single-serve products that are designed for immediate consumption, and may attract the patrons to the premise in search of the product that can be consumed immediately following the purchase in the near vicinity of the outlet, creating the opportunity for motivated offenders to act upon.<sup>vii</sup>

Dr. Snowden has done extensive research on violence and alcohol outlets in Milwaukee. She found that many types of violence and crime associated significantly with the

density of Class A off-premises outlets, including assault, robberies, and domestic violence, even controlling for neighborhood characteristics. She also found that the effect of off-premises Class A outlets on violence, especially male-on-female domestic violence occurred not just in the neighborhood where the outlets were located but also in immediately adjoining neighborhoods.<sup>viii</sup> In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the increased use of off-premises outlets as the source of alcohol (as opposed to drinking socially in controlled on-premises environments such as restaurants and bars) probably contributed to greater levels of drinking and likely contributed to increased domestic violence. Dr. Snowden recommends:

The first step in reducing domestic violence would be to also reduce the number of off-premise alcohol outlets operating within adjacent neighborhoods and prevent new off-premise alcohol outlets from opening in neighborhoods which already have a large concentration of off-premise alcohol outlets, and which border neighborhoods with similarly high concentrations of such outlets.<sup>ix</sup>

**Conclusion:** Reducing the concentration of Class A off-premises alcohol outlets and reducing the amount of alcohol sold by individual Class A off-premises alcohol outlets are both policies that can result in less underage alcohol consumption, and lower rates of violence and injury. An ordinance that limits the availability of Class A licenses may decrease the amount of underage drinking and decrease rates of violence and injury in the community.

If you have any additional questions, please contact:

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<sup>i</sup> Babor, Thomas F. and others, *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity: Research and public policy*, 3rd ed. p 145 (Oxford, 2022; online ed., Oxford Academic, 19 Jan. 2023),

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192844484.001.0001>, accessed 6 May 2023.

<sup>ii</sup> Babor, *et al.*, p. 134; Johnson, T. H., & Snowden, A. J. (2023). Neighborhood Ecological Models of Alcohol Outlet Density and Male-on-Female Domestic Violence: Accounting for Adjacent Place and Neighborhood Characteristics. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 0(0).

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00220426231159016>, accessed 11 May 2023.

<sup>iii</sup> Babor, *et al.*, p. 135.

<sup>iv</sup> Babor, *et al.*, p. 134.

<sup>v</sup> Rowland, B., Evans-Whipp, T., Hemphill, S. A., Leung, R., Livingston, M., & Toumbourou, J. W. (2016). The density of alcohol outlets and adolescent alcohol consumption: An Australian longitudinal analysis. *Health & Place*, 37, 43-49.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2015.11.004>

<sup>vi</sup> Babor, *et al.*, p. 93.

<sup>vii</sup> Aleksandra J. Snowden, Exploring violence: The role of neighborhood characteristics, alcohol outlets, and other micro-places, *Social Science Research*, Volume 82, 2019, pp 181-194, ISSN 0049-089X, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2019.04.018>.

<sup>viii</sup> Johnson, T. H., & Snowden, A. J. (2023). Neighborhood Ecological Models of Alcohol Outlet Density and Male-on-Female Domestic Violence: Accounting for Adjacent Place and Neighborhood Characteristics. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 0(0).

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00220426231159016>

<sup>ix</sup> *Id.*