



March 15, 2017

Alcohol Task Force
Department of Treasury
1 Ashburton Place, 12th floor
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Alcohol Task Force members,

We are writing to request that the Massachusetts Alcohol Task Force strongly consider the public health impact of potential alcohol laws in Massachusetts. Each day, our substance abuse prevention coalitions and community partners work to prevent early initiation of alcohol use and the potential for subsequent substance use disorders.

Alcohol laws and regulations have a direct effect on excessive alcohol use, including underage drinking and binge drinking rates. Therefore, it is imperative that public health, including underage drinking prevention, is taken into account when reviewing Massachusetts' alcohol laws. Specifically, we urge you to include a Public Health working group to advise your Task Force.

Alcohol consumption is directly related to public health costs and outcomes:

- Underage drinking cost Massachusetts 1.2 billion dollars in 2013¹ and each of our communities are battling high rates of underage drinking and other drug use. In 2015, almost 34% of MA high school students reported current alcohol use, and over 17% reported binge drinking.²
- States with stronger alcohol policies targeting adults and adult binge drinking are linked with lower underage drinking rates.³
- Alcohol consumption is “one of the most important known risk factors for human cancer”⁴ -including cancers of the female breast, head and neck, liver, stomach, and colorectum.⁵
- Prenatal alcohol exposure is the leading preventable cause of birth defects and intellectual and neurodevelopmental disabilities.⁶
- Excessive alcohol consumption cost Massachusetts over 5.6 billion dollars in 2010, equaling \$861 per capita in the state – or about \$1.93 for every drink sold.⁷

- Alcohol-impaired traffic fatality rates in Massachusetts are higher than the national rate (2011-2015)⁸

Certain alcohol laws are proven to have a direct effect on reducing excessive alcohol use, including underage drinking and binge drinking. The 2016 Surgeon General’s Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health⁹ outlines the following evidence-based population-level prevention measures:

Price and tax policies	
Higher prices on alcoholic beverages are associated with reductions in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems, including drinking and driving.	MA has the 7 th lowest tax rate in the country for beer and 32 nd lowest for wine and spirits.
Policies that affect access and availability of alcohol	
Policies affecting alcohol outlet density	Increases in the number of retail outlets in an area are associated with an increase in alcohol-related problems in that area.
Commercial host (dram shop) liability policies	Dram shop liability laws have been found to reduce alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities
Policies to reduce days and hours of alcohol sales	Reducing days/hours of sales, including Sunday sales or reducing sale hours by 2 hours, is proven to reduce alcohol-related harms.
State policies to privatize alcohol sales	Privatized alcohol sale policies increases per capita alcohol sales. Increased per capita sales are known to be a proxy for alcohol misuse.
Policies to reduce drinking and driving	
Two types of policies address drinking and driving: Drinking-oriented policies (policies that regulate alcohol production, sales, and consumption; raise alcohol taxes; and prevent sales to minors), and; Driving-oriented policies: policies that prevent an intoxicated person from driving	Drinking-oriented policies are associated with lower levels of impaired driving than driving-oriented policies.
Nine laws are associated with reducing underage drinking and driving (MA does NOT currently have the laws in bold)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Underage possession 2) Underage purchase 3) Use/lose laws 4) Zero tolerance laws 5) Minimum age of seller/bartender 21

	<p>6) Required state responsible beverage service training programs</p> <p>7) Fake id state support services for retailer</p> <p>8) Dram shop liability</p> <p>9) Social host civil liability</p>
Policies to reduce underage drinking	
Minimum legal drinking age (MLDA) of 21	MLDA of 21 is directly associated with less drinking, less heavy drinking, and fewer alcohol-related traffic fatalities among under 21 populations.
MLDA compliance checks	Compliance checks must be repeated and enforced in order to be effective.
Zero Tolerance Laws	The law that makes it illegal for under 21 to drive with any measurable BAC is associated with decrease in alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities.
Use/Lose laws	The law to suspend the license of an under 21 driver for underage alcohol violations is associated with fewer reports of drinking and driving.
Criminal Social Host Liability Laws	The law to hold adults criminally responsible for hosting underage drinking parties on their property is associated with decreases in binge drinking, drinking and driving, and alcohol-related traffic fatalities.
Civil Social Host Liability Laws	City/town and county level social host ordinances have shown to reduce alcohol-related car crashes and alcohol-related problems.
Proposals for reductions in alcohol advertising	Studies have shown that the more alcohol advertising youth see, the more likely they are to drink.

As you review the MA alcohol laws, we urge you to examine the implications of alcohol laws on the health of our MA youth and adults, as well as, the increased costs to the state.

We appreciate your time and attention.

Respectfully,

The Mystic Valley Public Health Coalition

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and on behalf of the following health professionals and entities:

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Sion Kim Harris, PhD, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and
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Allston-Brighton Substance Abuse Task Force
Arlington Youth Health & Safety Coalition
Brockton Area Opioid Abuse Prevention Collaborative
Communities That Care Coalition serving Franklin County and the North Quabbin
Dedham Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Prevention
Easthampton Healthy Youth Coalition
Everett Community Health Partnership - Substance Abuse Coalition
Framingham Coalition
Hudson Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition
IMPACT Norwood
Northboro/Southboro Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition
Dedham- Needham- Norwood- Westwood Substance Abuse Prevention Collaborative
SCOOP Coalition serving Hampden County
Somerville Cares About Prevention
Somerville Office of Prevention
SPAN: Substance Prevention Alliance Needham
Strategic Planning Initiative for Families & Youth (SPIFFY of Hampshire County)
The Cambridge Prevention Coalition
Westwood Public Health Department
Winchester Coalition for a Safer Community

cc: Governor Charles D. Baker; State Treasurer Deborah B. Goldberg; Senate President Stan Rosenberg; House Speaker Robert DeLeo; Commissioner Dr. Monica Bharel; State Senator Jason Lewis; Representative Paul Brodeur; Representative Michael Day; Jean M. Lorizio, Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission Chairman

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