

DATE: February 1, 2021
TO: Members of The Wisconsin State Legislature
FROM: The Wisconsin Association for Local Health Departments and Boards
The Wisconsin Public Health Association
RE: Senate Bill 22 (Co-authored by Assembly Rep. Steffen and Sen. Felzkowski)

WPHA is the largest statewide association of public health professionals in Wisconsin and serves as the collective voice for public health in Wisconsin.

WALHDAB is the statewide organization of city, county, and tribal board of health members and health department administrators providing a unified forum for improvement of public health at the local level.

Together, WPHA and WALHDAB represent over 1,200 public health professionals in communities across Wisconsin, striving to prevent, promote, and protect the health of Wisconsin residents. WPHA and WALHDAB want to provide feedback for the draft Cocktails-to-Go Legislation.

In recognition of the burden of excessive drinking in Wisconsin, we oppose any permanent change to state statute that makes alcohol more accessible. Binge drinking and heavy drinking can relate to other target public health problems like mental health and addiction. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this is not the time to increase access to unhealthy choices.

Key facts make alcohol misuse and excessive drinking one of the main priorities of public health professionals across Wisconsin:

- Wisconsin's adult **binge drinking rate exceeds the national average** (24% versus 16%).ⁱ
- Adult **binge drinking cost Wisconsin \$3.9 billion** in 2018.ⁱⁱ
- Binge drinking can result in preventable injury and even death from **accidents and violence**.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Recent studies suggest 60% of self-reported binge drinkers in the United States have **increased alcohol consumption during the pandemic**, while 28% of non-binge drinkers report increased alcohol consumption.^{iv} One study explains **reasons for increased drinking include increased alcohol availability** (34%) and increased stress (46%).^v

Examples of public health and safety controls missing from this draft bill are:

- Limiting container size;
- Requiring food/meal purchase to purchase a mixed drink for off-premises consumption;
- Limiting number of alcohol beverages purchased;
- Defining an end date;
- Including funding for law enforcement to implement interventions to prevent underage drinking and operating while intoxicated; and
- Funding emergency medical services to staff any resulting increase in preventable injuries.

We strongly support the bill's desired outcome to support small and local business during the COVID-19 pandemic, but there are many ways to support business without promoting problem drinking. Promising policies recognized by public health authorities include microfinance programs, which provide small loans aimed to grow jobs, alleviate poverty, develop skills development, etc.^{vi}

WPHA and WALHDAB support business development policies that do not risk public health.

ⁱ 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, 2018.

ⁱⁱ Linnan, S. Paltzer, J. Skalitzky, E. (October 14, 2019). The Burden of Binge Drinking in Wisconsin. Retrieved from go.wisc.edu/burdenofbingedinking.

ⁱⁱⁱ Moberg, P., Kuo, D. "Intoxicated Driver Program-2: Analysis of Arrests, IDP Compliance and 3 Year Recidivism" Prepared for: Intoxicated Driver Program, Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Bureau of Prevention Treatment and Recovery, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Population Health Institute, 2019.

^{iv} Weerakoon, S.M., Jetelina, K.K., Knell, G. Longer time spent at home during Covid 19 pandemic is associated with binge drinking among US adults. American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse. December 2020

^v Grossman. E., Benjamin-Neelon, S, Sonnenschein. Alcohol Consumption during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Cross-Sectional Survey of US Adults.

^{vi} Servon 2006* - Servon LJ. Microenterprise development in the United States: Current challenges and new directions. Economic Development Quarterly. 2006;20(4):351–67.