

California bill would allow hair salons to serve alcohol



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Under a bill lawmakers are sending to Gov. Jerry Brown, Californians could soon legally enjoy a complimentary glass of wine or beer while getting a haircut and a manicure.

Many beauty salons and barbershops in the state already offer alcoholic beverages free of charge to clients, but by doing so, they are breaking the law by distributing alcohol without a license.

The bill, AB1322, was passed by the Assembly in a unanimous vote in August. The law would allow them to serve a maximum of 12 ounces of beer or six ounces of wine per client, drinks would have to be provided to customers free of charge, and could only be served during business hours, no later than 10 p.m.

Currently, the serving of alcohol in a limousine or as part of a hot air balloon ride service without a license or permit is allowed, provided there is no extra charge or fee for the drinks, and the bill would extend the exemption to beauty salons and barbershops.

Barbershop and salon owners in the North Bay have expressed support for the bill, saying a glass of wine or beer creates a more relaxed atmosphere, and in some cases it's expected.

In Napa, as in other counties, serving wine at high-end salons is not uncommon. Many clients are involved in the wine industry, and some even bring their own wine. Salon owners say they are careful about how much they pour, and some serve wine only in the evening. Liability is an issue, owners say, and smaller salons cite cost as a reason to limit service. If legislation is passed, however, owners said they would be inclined to serve more.

The bill is also known as the "Drybar Bill," for a popular high-end salon chain, called 'Drybar', that is behind the legislation, along with 18 | 8 Fine Men's Salons. Both have locations across the North Bay. Assemblyman Tom Daily from Anaheim, the home of Drybar's corporate headquarters, authored the bill.

It has met with opposition from Alcohol Justice, an industry watchdog in San Rafael. The organization estimates that the number of venues allowed to serve alcohol in the state will increase by 41 percent if the bill is signed into law, without sufficient regulation or proper alcohol-serving training. It contends the change will expose alcohol to minors and further contribute to underage drinking.

Along with the California Alcohol Policy Alliance, Alcohol Justice recently staged demonstrations in opposition to the legislation in front of Drybar Brentwood in Los Angeles and the 18 | 8 Fine Men's Salon in Lafayette.

"The legislation would allow California's 42,000 barbershops and beauty parlors to give away alcohol without cost, licenses, permits, monitoring, Responsible Beverage Service training, or enforcement of any current regulations," said Bruce Lee Livingston, the organization's executive director and CEO.

Some barbershops and salons do go through the process of getting a liquor license, Livingston said, and he would be satisfied with a special license that allows them to serve alcohol.

"We don't need to change the law. That's just giving up on regulation," he said.

Livingston also said current regulation is complaint-driven, and he is not aware of any barbershop or salon being shut down due to serving alcohol.

Cyndi Havard owns three salons in the North Bay; Sproos hair salon in San Anselmo, and a Style Bar in Greenbrae and in Petaluma. She experimented serving wine at Sproos but said it didn't catch on.

"We tried it and it was just sitting there. I think when clients get used to it, then they want it," Havard said.

When she opened her second salon in Greenbrae, someone tipped off the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control and Havard received a warning call.

"They told us if we served alcohol we would get caught, and there was a fine for serving it without a license," Havard said.

According to John Carr with the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, upon receiving a complaint of a barber shop or salon serving alcohol, the department will send the establishment a warning letter. At most, the action is a misdemeanor with a \$250 fine. Carr also said he was not aware of any shops being closed for serving wine or beer, and the department can't regulate something it doesn't license.

Havard said she supports the legislation, but if passed, still would not serve alcohol.

"We serve lattes and other quality beverages," she said.

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