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Government Under the Influence of the Spirits Industry

California lawmakers promote expansion of cocktails-to-go and public drinking while advocates say Take Action to reduce harm!

SAN RAFAEL, CALIFORNIA (May 24, 2021) – [Alcohol Justice](#), the San Rafael, California-based alcohol industry watchdog and the [California Alcohol Policy Alliance \(CAPA\)](#) are charging the California Legislature with being ***under the influence*** of restaurants, bars and the alcohol spirits industry.

“Watching California legislators race through so-called ‘small business relief’ bills is like watching a gasoline tanker speeding down the Grapevine in the fast lane during a snow storm,” stated Bruce Lee Livingston, Executive Director/CEO of Alcohol Justice. *“They are ignoring the ongoing dangers of public, open carry drinking and cocktails-to-go getting into the hands of underage youth.”*

Over the past year the ABC has issued numerous “Regulatory Relief” orders that were only meant to be temporary lifelines for restaurants and bars. However, as the pandemic is subsiding the big spirits trade association is pushing hard to make many of those privileges permanent, with small bars and restaurants making the noise that the pine boxes obstructing sidewalks, alleys and parking spaces should be a permanent part of California’s urban life.

“Emergency measures put in place by the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) are being rammed through into permanent law,” added Livingston. *“It is part of a national campaign by Diageo and the Distilled Spirits Council to flood our communities with public drinking and unregulated, unlicensed home delivery.”*

Over 30 states allowed cocktails-to-go during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and since then eleven states have made it permanent, including five in May 2021 led by Texas, Florida and Georgia. Washington D.C. has made it permanent, and numerous states are extending it for a year or two. This level of coordinated, state-house lobbying does not take place without national big bucks from Big Alcohol players like Diageo and its lobbying association, the Distilled Spirits Council.

The California legislature has responded with a case of bills to expand and extend alcohol sales and consumption on public sidewalks, alleys, parking lots, and “parklets”, along with the creation

of “party zones,” and permanent cocktails-to-go without strong licensing requiring Responsible Beverage Service training for home delivery companies.

“It’s clear, even when our communities are facing racial, health and socioeconomic inequities, the alcohol industry and governing bodies continue to prioritize economic profit over people’s lives,” said Veronica De Lara, MPA, Chair California Alcohol Policy Alliance (CAPA). *“We need to stop enabling policies that continue to disproportionately impact our communities. Policies that make alcohol more accessible and available are business-sided and not in the best interest of communities facing alcohol related harms. They just add to many other hardships in the middle of a global pandemic. What is our priority? Is it only about making money?”*

“The priorities of California legislators do not include responding to over 10,500 alcohol-related deaths, 165,000 alcohol-related hospitalizations, \$14.5 billion in government costs, and \$35 billion in total related economic harm annually,” stated Michael Scippa, Public Affairs Director at Alcohol Justice. *“There is no relief from these catastrophic numbers in the current round of legislation. Our elected leaders are myopic in their praise of these bills which are designed to encourage alcohol consumption, which research tells us will just make matters worse. They choose to ignore the science and the facts about alcohol-related harm in the state.”*

The worst of the worst are:

[SB 314](#) (Wiener) – This bloated bill allows public drinking just about anywhere on public property, among many other bar industry giveaways.

[SB 793](#) (Wiener) – Allows beer, wine and spirit sales wherever there is live music, and allows underage youth entrance.

[SB 389](#) (Dodd) – Permanently allows restaurants to sell and/or deliver cocktails-to-go.

[AB 61](#) (Gabriel) – Requires local governments to allow outdoor dining and alcohol sales without review.

[AB 1242](#) (Bauer-Kahan) – Duplicates AB 61.

“These bills are an attempt to make California cities look like Bourbon Street and allow public drinking anywhere,” said Livingston. *“Opportunistic deregulation and expanded alcohol availability are not magic bullets for saving restaurants and bars. They will produce negative health outcomes, including more underage and binge drinking. The legislature so far is rolling over on making ABC’s temporary deregulation into permanent law, but it’s a power grab by the spirits industry that will last a generation unless the legislature sobers up.”*

Alcohol Justice and CAPA believe it’s time for California legislators to honor their oaths of office to protect health and safety. Harm reduction should be the goal – not misdirected economic recovery promoting outdoor, public consumption of products that cause so much pain, suffering and death in California communities. The public is encouraged to take action and tell their elected leaders to VOTE NO on this legislation – *public health is more important than public drinking.*

Click here now: <https://bit.ly/3oFz1uo> or text **PUBLICHEALTH to 313131 to tell California legislators to VOTE NO on these dangerous bills.**

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