



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission

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To: Joint Interim Committee on the Third Special Session of 2020
From: Dr. Reginald Richardson, Executive Director, Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission
Date: December 17, 2020
RE: Testimony on LC 10

Co-Chair Courtney, Co-Chair Kotek, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on LC 10, the Restaurant Relief Package. I know these are extremely difficult times for many Oregonians, and those working in the hospitality industry have been hit particularly hard. I believe the Legislature is considering this concept in an attempt to support our neighbors, friends, and community members who work in bars and restaurants and have substantially decreased incomes because of COVID-19 precautions. However, increasing access to alcohol through “cocktails-to-go” has its own set of costs and impacts to these very same people, and it is for this reason that I write to you with my concerns.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) caution us about increasing alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic. Increased stress can lead to increased alcohol use, and increased alcohol use brings with it a host of risks such as further increasing anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions; increasing incidents of violence, injuries, and motor vehicle crashes; and increasing the likelihood of experiencing long-term health issues such as liver disease, cancer, heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure. The CDC also warns us that drinking alcohol weakens your body’s ability to fight infections, which increases the risk of complications and makes it harder to get better if you become ill.

Here in Oregon we have some of the highest substance use disorder rates in the country, and the most common disorder in our State is an alcohol use disorder. This is one of the reasons why Oregon’s Substance Use Strategic Plan calls for decreasing access to alcohol. We have also seen the need for substance use services increase during COVID-19, but at the same time some providers are providing care to fewer people because of COVID-19 restrictions. Increasing access to alcohol through “cocktails-to-go” will not help us achieve the goals set out in the Strategic Plan and it may make it harder to address the growing behavioral health needs that COVID-19 has brought us.

I appreciate that supporters of LC 10 have tried to craft a proposal which is narrow and only allows “cocktails-to-go” for a limited time period. Still, I remain concerned about the impacts of increasing access to alcohol, especially during this time when so many of our community members feel isolated and we are struggling to provide needed behavioral and other support services. I ask that you remember not only the potential financial benefits this proposal brings but also the costs to our State and its people when considering LC 10.