



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission

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To: House General Government Committee

From: Dr. Reginald Richardson, Executive Director, Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission

Date: April 29, 2021

RE: Testimony on SB 317

Chair Wilde and members of the committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to offer comments about SB 317. When the Legislature passed SB 1801—known as the “cocktails-to-go” bill—during the Special Session last December, I submitted testimony at that time highlighting my concerns. I questioned the choice of increasing access to alcohol at any time, but particularly during a pandemic when we are struggling with increased behavioral health needs. However, I was told the cocktails-to-go measure would be a temporary form of assistance to help those hit particularly hard by COVID-19 restrictions, and that the ability to purchase cocktails-to-go would end shortly after Oregon’s state of emergency ended.

Now SB 317, which will make cocktails-to-go permanent in Oregon, is moving its way through the Legislature, and my concerns have only grown.

To give committee members some context about the state of substance misuse 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. Alcohol use is the third leading cause of preventable deaths in Oregon—about 2,000 of our neighbors, colleagues, friends, and family members die each year from alcohol-related causes. Also, OHA and ECO Northwest recently released a report that found the cost to Oregon in 2019 of excessive drinking was \$4.8 billion. That’s an amount that is equivalent to the annual revenue in 2019 of companies such as American Express, Best Buy, and Delta Airlines.

These are just some of the reasons why a key prevention goal in Oregon’s Strategic Plan for Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Support Services is decreasing access to alcohol. I’ll also note that we have seen the need for substance use services increase during COVID-19. Increasing access to alcohol through “cocktails-to-go” will not help us achieve the goals found in the Strategic Plan and it may make it harder to address the growing behavioral health needs that COVID-19 has brought us.

I have heard one of the reasons to make cocktails-to-go permanent is because there were very few complaints received by OLCC about it. I’m not surprised there are few complaints since the ability to purchase a cocktail-to-go is still relatively new and the consequences of alcohol use are not always immediately known. I remain concerned about the impacts of increasing access to alcohol through cocktails-to-go, especially when we know Oregon is struggling to provide needed behavioral and other support services. I ask that you remember not only the convenience cocktails-to-go brings, but also the costs to our State and its people when considering SB 317.