

December 3, 2018

Councilmember Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Chair
Honorable Councilmembers
Planning and Land Use Management Committee
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Restaurant Beverage Program (Council File #17-0981)

Dear Councilmember, Marqueece Harris-Dawson,

I am the director of United Coalition East Prevention Project (UCEPP) in the Skid Row area of downtown Los Angeles and Community Centered Emergency Room Project (CCERP) in Boyle Heights. I am writing to oppose the proposed Restaurant Beverage Program (Council File #17-0981).

A primary tenet of UCEPP/CCERP is our commitment to change environments in order to discourage alcohol-related problems. Additionally, we have worked hard to promote understanding of the link between the environment and health. One of the clearest manifestations of that link is the impact to health that occurs when a neighborhood is saturated with alcohol serving establishments. Addiction, auto crashes, violence, especially domestic violence, and public intoxication are just a few of the consequences likely to result.

On behalf of our members, we are requesting the city to abandon this plan for the following reasons:

First, the plan is based on the faulty premise that the best way to streamline alcohol permitting is to utilize "standardized" conditions. It is faulty for two reasons: first, alcohol permitting shouldn't be streamlined. Alcohol is a product that poses serious threats and has caused significant harm to people and places in Los Angeles. The city and its regulatory agencies should consider the permits carefully and not automatically approve them without analysis. Secondly, a standardized approach is the *opposite* of what is called for. Los Angeles neighborhoods have very different needs and exist in very different contexts. Several city neighborhoods are already saturated with alcohol outlets and have been for many years, a circumstance that has proven to be impossible to reverse. Further, excessive availability of alcohol presents a host of problems. Excessive alcohol sales have been shown to discourage other retail uses. Moreover, increasing the number of alcohol outlets poses a threat to neighborhood health and safety. Research has shown that the density of alcohol outlets is related to increased crime and violence¹, including drunk driving, domestic violence and assault, public drinking and urination, panhandling, and loitering. Further, an excessive number of outlets can spur alcohol and drug addiction² and heighten the risk of relapse for those in recovery from addiction.

These same neighborhoods are now also contending with the slew of marijuana dispensaries, both legal and illegal. A one size fits all approach is not in the best interest of such communities. Instead, they need an approach that takes into account what other uses are already operating in the vicinity, including alcohol density,

¹ The Association between Density of Alcohol Establishments and Violent Crime within Urban Neighborhoods
Traci L. Toomey, Darin J. Erickson, Bradley P. Carlin, Kathleen M. Lenk, Harrison S. Quick, Alexis M. Jones, Eileen M. Harwood

² <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/prevention.htm>

as well as, the presence of sensitive uses (i.e. schools, parks, drug/alcohol treatment programs, etc.), and the level of crime, including domestic violence. Further, a so-called streamlined or standardized approach removes the ability of residents and stakeholders from the surrounding community to have any voice in the placement of yet another alcohol use in their environments – despite the fact that they are the ones that will have to contend with the aftermath of the decision.

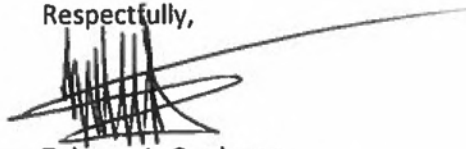
It is also a fallacy to claim that speedy approvals are necessary by citing that on-site alcohol outlets will generate revenue, without also offsetting those figures with the cost taxpayers must bear for public safety services, including police, ambulance, fire, and sanitation, to say nothing of the increased public health costs of addiction and domestic violence. Moreover, the stated justification that this measure will create jobs is also misleading. Restaurants do not produce a significant number of jobs, and the jobs restaurants do create are low-wage jobs which don't pay enough to enable workers to support themselves or their families. These jobs are often part-time and rarely provide health insurance or other benefits and they are not typically career path positions. Business and property owners and developers are the only ones likely to profit from these outlets - not workers, not neighbors, and not taxpayers.

The risk posed by increasing alcohol availability is not worth taking. In addition, it is foolhardy to assume that once problems occur they will be addressed by enforcement of conditions. The city has never adequately funded the regulation and enforcement of alcohol permits, and when resources for enforcement are expended, they are not distributed equitably. Low-income neighborhoods and communities of color have endured the harm of rampant nuisance activity and crime in around alcohol outlets (both off-site and on-site) for decades. It has been common for retailers in these communities to agree to conditions and obtain permits initially, only to then operate their businesses in a manner that falls far below the required standards. Yet because monitoring and enforcement by city departments is so poor, it is difficult – if not impossible – for these businesses to be held accountable or to improve their operations.

The system of enforcement being proposed here is set up to fail. The burden of monitoring businesses and reporting violations will continue to fall on community residents – just as the current system does. It is both unrealistic and unreasonable to expect residents to take time out of their lives and put themselves in harm's way to collect evidence of violations. And in our experience, community residents who have documented violation must then struggle to have their voices heard by navigating the process of filing complaints and participating in public hearings. It is unfair to expect residents to speak up about alcohol outlets once they are in violation of conditions, yet to deny them the opportunity to weigh in on the feasibility of the use before a permit is issued.

For the reasons stated here, we urge you to oppose this proposal. Please do not hesitate to call me at 213.622.1621, if you have any questions.

Respectfully,



Zelenne L. Cardenas
Director of Prevention Services