

The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

L.A. ban on some alcohol ads will protect young people, advocates say

The Los Angeles City Council unanimously passed a measure Tuesday that will remove alcohol advertising from all public transit, including bus-stop benches and enclosures.

By Gloria Goodale, Staff writer January 21, 2015



Alcohol Justice/PRNewsFoto

Los Angeles — [Los Angeles](#) on Tuesday effectively became the largest US city to ban alcohol advertising on some city-owned or city-controlled property. Specifically, the Los Angeles measure, which the city council passed unanimously, will remove such advertising from all public transit, including bus-stop benches and enclosures.

[Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti](#) must still sign the measure into law, but he has enthusiastically endorsed it.

"This is in line with my administration's focus on improving the quality of life for all Angelenos and helping boost the sense of pride people have in our neighborhoods," Mayor Garcetti said in a statement.

A coalition of some 40 community and grass-roots groups helped get the ordinance passed, which advocates say will protect the region's youths.

Removing ads that encourage underage drinking is crucial, says Jorge Castillo, advocacy director for Alcohol Justice, an industry watchdog group in San Rafael, Calif. Families and youths, he points out, use city-owned and -controlled property every single day – schools, libraries, recreational centers, and bus shelters.

"The City of Los Angeles has taken another step towards truly protecting its most vulnerable residents," Mr. Castillo says.

The restrictions, however, will not take effect for another seven years, when the city's current advertising contract for outdoor advertising expires. Also, it does not affect such venues as the airport or convention center, which are exempt because they house restaurants and other venues that sell liquor.

Other cities that have recently joined the effort to curb alcohol advertising include Philadelphia, San Francisco, and [Boston](#), with Boston passing a similar measure in 2012. But New York, Chicago, and New Orleans are among cities that have yet to get on the bandwagon, Castillo says. He attributes such a stance partly to resistance among city officials reluctant to lose advertising dollars from alcohol companies.

Indeed, according to an October 2014 report from the [American Journal of Public Health](#), alcohol companies spend at least \$4 billion a year on marketing and promotion nationwide.

The report also says that alcohol is the drug young people are most likely to have used in the past 30 days and is responsible for approximately 4,700 deaths per year among persons younger than 21 years.

In Los Angeles County alone, alcohol-related crashes, violent crimes, and deaths cost taxpayers more than \$10.8 billion annually, according to the county's Department of Public Health,

The new measure will thus save lives and money, says Dennis Hathaway, president of the Ban Billboard Blight coalition in Los Angeles. "We applaud the City Council for recognizing that the public right-of-way should not be used to help market products that cause harm to our youth and burden taxpayers with millions in costs for law enforcement, medical, and other services related to alcohol abuse," he said in a statement.

There was no organized opposition to the measure, which was a 3-1/2-year effort. A Monitor request for comment from JCDecaux – which holds the contract for outdoor advertising in Los Angeles – was not immediately responded to.

According to the American Journal of Public Health report, young people are especially susceptible to alcohol advertising. Also according to the report, as noted by Castillo, there is

growing evidence that alcohol advertising influences youth alcohol consumption, including earlier and heavier consumption.

Young people may begin drinking because of peer pressure, said Councilman Paul Koretz in remarks before Tuesday's vote. "But there's no doubt that advertising is a culprit in enticing the young."