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Governing Under the Influence (GUI): California Legislators Take Special Interest Alcohol Money, Choose Profits Over Public Health & Safety



Advocates say STOP taking the money and STOP using COVID-19 to justify alcohol deregulation!

SAN RAFAEL, CALIFORNIA (August 16, 2021) – [Alcohol Justice](#), the San Rafael, California-based alcohol industry watchdog and the [California Alcohol Policy Alliance \(CAPA\)](#) are charging California legislators with GUI (Governing Under the Influence) for accepting special interest money and supporting “pandemic relief” alcohol deregulation to benefit restaurant and bar businesses.

“A codependent relationship continues between Big Alcohol and the California legislature,” stated Bruce Lee Livingston, Executive Director/CEO of Alcohol Justice. *“In these final months of the regular legislative session, special interest alcohol corporate money is being poured on legislators to deregulate at taxpayer expense. We ask key committee chairs and the governor to stop these bills and place public health before public drinking.”*

The legislation still moving forward that seeks to make COVID-related, temporary regulatory reductions more permanent includes:

[SB 314](#) (Wiener, D-San Francisco) Would expand and extend temporary caterers alcohol license privileges and allow alcohol consumption on public property.

[SB 389](#) (Dodd, D- Napa, Wiener, D-San Francisco) Would allow on-sale alcohol licensees to sell off-sale and deliver to consumers.

[AB 61](#) (Gabriel, D-Encino, Gipson, D-Carson) Would extend for up to two years pandemic-related services such as expanded alcoholic beverage sales and outdoor dining in nontraditional spaces.

These bills are on track to pass and will take effect either immediately or on January 1, 2022. Some have sunset dates of a year or two. However, state public health and safety advocates fear the industry will continue pushing the legislature down a slippery slope to permanently reduce critical alcohol regulations to enhance profits.

The following graphic shows the Authors, and Principal Co-Authors, of these “pandemic relief” bills and the estimated amount of special interest money each has reported accepting (2017-2021 FollowtheMoney.org) from alcohol-related businesses and associations that would benefit from the passage of the bills.

Governing Under the Influence of Big Alcohol Money

Bill Authors



Dodd

\$158,331



Gipson

\$54,120



Wiener

\$31,200



Gabriel

\$5,700

Principal Co-Authors



Bates

\$44,422



Hertzberg

\$41,756



Quirk

\$31,000



Friedman

\$17,150



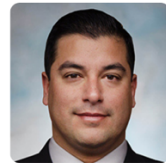
Allen

\$13,200



Bauer-Kahan

\$5,300



Villapudua

\$3,100



Source:
FollowTheMoney.org

“While the need to support businesses through economic recovery is important, it is critical to keep public health a priority. As a tax-paying constituent, and advocate for youth and community safety, my primary concerns are with Sales of Alcoholic Beverages To-Go and [alcohol] Deliveries to Consumers,” said Jeanne Shimatsu, AADAP, Inc. (Asian American Drug Abuse Program), CAPA Representative, Los Angeles. *“Alcohol cocktails are not an essential food or drink, allowing ‘alcoholic beverages to go’ in easy-to-access containers within a vehicle is an open door to youth access and consumption. More importantly, contributing to the dangers of ‘drinking while driving’ for everyone; those in the vehicle, on the road and on the street, costs to lives, costs to cities, and the list goes on.”*

The glorification and promotion of public drinking implicit in these bills will benefit business owners at the public’s expense. Expanding and extending alcohol sales and consumption on public sidewalks, alleys, parking lots, and “parklets,” along with permanent alcohol delivery for on-sale licensees are not good public health policy.

“Expansion of outdoor alcohol service, alcoholic beverages-to-go, and unregulated home alcohol delivery will add to increases in alcohol consumption, pandemic stress, and lead to more mental health issues including suicides,” stated Maribel Briseño, CAPA Representative (Palmdale). *“Public health and safety is in danger. Instead of saving businesses which also includes large corporate chains, not just small business, state government should be focused on saving people’s lives.”*

Public health advocates are concerned that alcohol deliveries to customers, particularly through third party delivery services, lack regulation from point of purchase to delivery at a home where there is no formal legal age check to verify that a sober adult is purchasing and receiving the alcohol order. In addition, the legislature is ignoring the public safety risk of continuing to allow streets and sidewalks to be clogged with outdoor diners.

“Allowing businesses to continue outdoor dining, infringes on the rights of individuals with disabilities and pedestrians,” added Briseño. *“People’s safety is put in danger by having to walk into the street because tables obstruct their right of way on public walkways. This is a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). We should not be compromising the public’s right of way.”*

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have estimated that annually in California there are 10,500 alcohol-related deaths, 165,000 alcohol-related hospitalizations, \$14.5 billion in government costs, and \$35 billion in total related economic harm. *“In the eagerness to return to economic normalcy, we cannot by-pass common sense to gain a few more cents, especially when the cost is about people’s lives,”* added Shimatsu.

Alcohol Justice and CAPA believe harm reduction should be the legislature’s primary concern, not industry-influenced, 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 to tell the Governor and their elected leaders that *public health is more important to the state’s recovery than public drinking. **Click here now: <https://bit.ly/3oFz1uo> or text PUBLICHEALTH to 313131 to oppose these bills.***

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