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11/19/2025

Alcoholic Beverage Control Board
Re: Public Comment for December 2, 2025 ABC Board Meeting

Dear Members of the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board,

I am submitting this public comment regarding the increase in Restaurant–Eating Place (REPL) licenses in the City and Borough of Sitka and the significant concerns this trend presents for youth safety, public health, and community well-being.

Over the past several months, it has become clear that there is a serious gap in oversight and accountability in the REPL approval process. Locally, the City and Borough of Sitka operates under the assumption that the State holds primary responsibility. However, when speaking with ABC Board representatives, I learned that the Board relies heavily on the recommendations of local governing bodies. This mutual reliance results in *no one being fully accountable* for assessing the long-term impacts of increasing licenses, particularly when it comes to youth risk factors, mental health considerations, and broader public health implications.

Another critical concern is the lack of clarity around population metrics used to justify new licenses. Sitka's population fluctuates dramatically due to seasonal tourism, yet there is no clear direction on whether these temporary visitor populations are included in the formula. Using inflated numbers that include tourists misrepresents the actual needs and realities of our year-round residents. This ambiguity has affected the data being used to support additional licenses and undermines the accuracy of decision-making.

The research on the public health impacts of increased alcohol availability is clear and consistent. **Youth alcohol use increases when the density of alcohol outlets, such as restaurants and bars, goes up.** Multiple peer-reviewed studies have found that:

- Adolescents living in areas with higher alcohol outlet density exhibit **higher rates of both general drinking and heavy drinking**.
- Higher density of on-premise outlets is associated with **greater odds of lifetime alcohol use** and **recent heavy drinking** among youth.

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- The density of alcohol-licensed restaurants specifically has been linked to **increased rates of underage drinking**.
- Higher outlet density increases youth perception of alcohol availability, which is a key driver of use and risk-taking behaviors.
- Youth in areas with many on-premise outlets report more alcohol-related harms, including drinking and driving and attempts to purchase alcohol.

These findings show a clear pattern: **more licenses mean more youth drinking and more harm.** This should be a central consideration in any decision to expand alcohol availability.

Beyond the data, expanding REPL licenses shapes community norms. We saw this with cannabis licensing, where increased access influenced youth perception, making use seem more normal and less risky. Adding more alcohol-serving establishments risks reinforcing similar beliefs among our youth, undermining prevention efforts and contributing to rising risk factors in our community.

Additionally, the current process does not adequately address mental health or substance use concerns. Increasing alcohol availability without a structured public health review overlooks significant vulnerabilities in our population and fails to consider the broader implications for community wellness.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the ABC Board:

1. **Require a public health impact review**, including youth risk factors, before approving additional REPL licenses.
2. **Clarify population-count methodology**, particularly regarding whether tourist numbers should be included.
3. **Strengthen accountability and transparency** between the ABC Board and local governments to ensure that public health, youth safety, and community values are appropriately weighed.
4. **Engage community stakeholders**, including public health practitioners, youth representatives, mental health providers, and prevention coalitions, in conversations about the implications of expanding licenses.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment for your December 2, 2025 meeting. I appreciate the Board's work and your consideration of how these decisions impact youth, families, and the long-term health of our community.

Sincerely,
Michelle Kavouras,

Sitka Counseling, Prevention Director

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