

SUNDAY ALCOHOL SALES AND EXPANDED COLD BEER SALES: WHY INDIANA CAN'T AFFORD THIS "CONVENIENCE"

As the Indiana State Legislature considers allowing statewide alcoholic beverage sales on Sundays and the sale of cold beer at grocery and convenience stores, testimony in favor of such sales in front of the Interim Study Committee on Alcoholic Beverages has focused heavily on two points: 1. Sunday alcohol sales and expanded cold-beer sales will be more convenient for consumers; and 2. Sunday alcohol sales and expanded cold-beer sales will bring economic gain to owners of grocery and convenience stores that sell such products.

Drug Free Marion County strongly believes that these reasons do not justify statewide Sunday sales of alcohol.

The "convenience" of Sunday alcohol sales and expanded cold-beer sales comes at a cost – one that the citizens of Indiana and the state itself simply cannot afford.

And any economic gains made by one segment of the marketplace – if such gains would materialize – would be offset by the economic losses that would occur *on a much greater scale* and *affect a much larger number of individuals* as the result of alcohol-related crashes, law-enforcement costs, social services, medical care, work loss and other issues related to alcohol abuse.

In fact, Marion County and Indiana cannot handle the social and economic challenges that *already* exist as a direct result of alcohol abuse. *Increasing the availability of alcohol* – a controlled and regulated substance, not an ordinary grocery or convenience-store product such as milk or bread – by allowing Sunday sales and expanded "ready-to-drink" cold beer sales *would only add additional burdens to systems and services already struggling to deal with these problems.*

Let's examine exactly who would be "convenienced" by Sunday alcohol sales and expanded cold-beer sales:

Sunday sales of alcoholic beverages and expanded cold-beer sales would be more convenient for underage drinkers.

- *Indiana already has a problem with underage drinking.* In 2005, underage drinkers consumed 17.2 percent of all alcohol sold in the state.ⁱ That's higher than nationwide rates, which show that underage drinkers consume about 11 percent of the alcohol purchased.ⁱⁱ Young Indiana adults ages 18 to 25 have the highest rates of alcohol use in Indiana.ⁱⁱⁱ
- *In 2005, underage drinking cost Indiana taxpayers \$1.3 billion,* including charges for medical care, work loss, property damage, fetal alcohol syndrome and treatment.^{iv}
- Since the 1970s, a growing international body of public health research has consistently shown that *even relatively small increases in alcohol availability lead to more consumption and, in turn, to more negative consequences* associated with underage drinking (as well as with alcohol abuse and alcohol-related fatalities)
- A 2007 study of 434 Marion County middle and high school students by Drug Free Marion County showed that 42 percent perceived that *one of the ways teens get alcohol is by stealing it from retail stores* – the very locations pushing for Sunday alcohol and expanded cold-beer sales.

- Even with current regulations in place, alcohol and drug use already contribute to the low graduation rate of Indianapolis Public Schools, which stands at only 42 percent^v. Nationwide, that rate is 53 percent in the nation's 50 largest cities.^{vi}

“Convenience” is not worth an increase in underage drinking.

Sunday sales of alcoholic beverages and expanded cold-beer sales would be more convenient for at-risk drinkers.

- According to a 2004 World Health Organization report, most studies demonstrate that drinking rates or harmful effects of drinking increase with increased sales times, and decrease when they are shortened.^{vii}
- Adult binge drinkers make up only about 23 percent of the population, but consume 76 percent of the available alcohol; frequent binge drinkers represent only seven percent of the population, but drink 45 percent of the available alcohol.^{viii}
- Forty percent of the American public does not drink at all. So *making alcohol more convenient enables the 25 percent of the American population who regularly drink heavily (20 percent) and are addicted (5 percent) – the very ones who have the most potential to harm the public and themselves.*^{ix}
- *Marion County already sees high numbers of at-risk drinkers.* In 2007, county data showed that Marion County hospitals conducted 14,672 blood alcohol tests on 11,753 patients. Of those tests, 4,800 showed a blood alcohol level of .08 or greater; 3,000 were at more than twice the legal limit.
- *Indiana and Marion County do not have the financial resources to treat the number of at-risk drinkers we already have.* Data from the Division of Mental Health and Addiction shows that only 42 percent of individuals seeking treatment for mental health and chronic addiction are served under the Hoosier Assistance Plan. In Marion County, even fewer – 35 percent – of those seeking care receive help.

“Convenience” is not worth an increase in at-risk drinking.

Sunday sales of alcoholic beverages and expanded cold-beer sales would make drinking and driving more convenient.

- With its current alcoholic beverage laws in place, Indiana now has one of the lowest rates of alcohol-related automobile crashes or fatalities.
- Even with that low rate, *alcohol-related crashes already cost Indiana residents \$1 per drink – that adds up to millions of dollars.*^x
- Beer is the drink most commonly consumed by people stopped for alcohol-impaired driving or involved in alcohol-related crashes. Eighty percent of drivers arrested for DWI nationwide identified beer as their drink of choice. (beersoaksamerica.org).
- *In 2007, Indiana recorded 9,942 alcohol-related crashes.* Those crashes resulted in 232 deaths, 532 incapacitating injuries, 3,025 injuries and 6,153 incidents of property damage.

“Convenience” is not worth an increase in alcohol-related crashes – and the social and economic costs of those crashes.

Sunday sales of alcoholic beverages and expanded cold-beer sales would make crime and socially destructive behaviors more convenient.

- A significant body of research, as reported by Alcoholpolicymd.com, has consistently shown that, *as availability of and access to alcohol increase through an increase in alcohol outlets, so does the disintegration of a neighborhood's economy and social structure.*

- *Many studies have established direct correlations between high alcohol availability and increases in drunken driving, sexual assault, crime and violence. The relationship between high crime/violence/underage drinking and alcohol-outlet density is statistically significant regardless of socioeconomic and other demographic factors.* (Alcoholpolicymd.com)
- After the United Kingdom passed a law in 2003 permitting 24-hour-per-day alcohol sales in bars and stores, “public order offences” (vomiting, public urination, excessive noise, general “rowdiness”) increased 136 percent in the next four years, according to a 2008 report.^{xi}
- A 2008 study by Notre Dame and MIT showed that when blue laws are repealed, especially those involving the sale of alcohol, church attendance drops 15 percent, and church donations decrease by 25 percent. (Quarterly Journal of Economics, 2008)
- The same study found that those who had attended church and stopped after the repeal of blue laws showed the greatest increase in substance abuse.

“Convenience” is not worth a decrease in a community’s quality of life or its residents’ community involvement.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

The misuse of alcohol creates a significant burden for individuals, families, neighborhoods and city/county/state governments.

Building an economy around the “convenience” of alcohol is one economic-development policy Indiana and Marion County can not afford.

ⁱ “Underage Drinking in Indiana: The Facts,” 2006, Pacific Institute of Research and Evaluation

ⁱⁱ OJJDP US Department of Justice 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Just the Facts; Substance Abuse in Indiana,” 2007, Center for Health Policy at IUPUI

^{iv} “Underage Drinking in Indiana: The Facts,” 2006, Pacific Institute of Research and Evaluation

^v <http://www.pam.ips.k12.in.us/?id=4210>

^{vi} “Cities in Crisis 2009: Closing the Graduation Gap,” America’s Promise Alliance/Editorial Projects in Education , 2009

^{vii} “What are the most effective and cost-effective interventions in alcohol control?” World Health Organization, 2004.

^{viii} OJJDP US Department of Justice 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Page 2.

^{ix} “Drinking in America: Myths, Realities and Prevention Policy,” OJJDP, 2005.

^x “Alcohol Factline,” Indiana Prevention Resource Center, 2006.

^{xi} “The Dangers of Alcohol Deregulation: The United Kingdom Experience,” Public Action Management, 2009