Regulation of Alcohol Outlet Density

Background
Alcohol outlet density is the concentration of establishments in which alcohol may be purchased, such as bars and liquor stores, within communities. The goal of government regulations upon alcohol outlet density is to limit the number of establishments in a given geographic area. This is done through alcohol licensing and city zoning practices. A higher concentration of alcohol outlets is known to contribute to negative health and social consequences including binge drinking, violence, crime, and medical harms (Campbell et al., 2009). For this reason, the regulation of alcohol outlet density is a public health concern and can be used to reduce the potential harms of excessive consumption. Understanding the process of obtaining alcohol outlet licenses can play a significant role in combating further establishments who intend to increase the alcohol outlet density.

Indiana Data and Research Findings
Several studies have examined correlations between alcohol outlets and the impacts they have in communities. A study completed in Bloomington, IN showed that the total alcohol density was significantly associated with simple (misdemeanor) and aggravated (felony) assaults. The study emphasized that on-premise alcohol outlets, for example restaurants and bars, had a higher correlation with simple assaults, while off-premise outlets, such as liquor and grocery stores, had a stronger relation to aggravated assaults (Snowden & Pridemore, 2013).

A study in Cincinnati, OH conducted by Indiana University professors produced similar results. Researchers found that the addition of one off-premise outlet per square mile created 2.3 more simple assaults and 0.6 aggravated assaults per square mile. In on-premise sites, the research showed that 1.15 more simple assaults were created with the addition of one restaurant per square mile, and 1.5 more simple assaults by adding one bar per square mile (Pridemore & Grubesic, 2012).

In a meta-analysis of nine time-series studies, seven studies showed a positive association between an increase in alcohol outlet density and higher alcohol consumption. This was coupled with related problems, specifically interpersonal violence (Campbell et al., 2009).

Obtaining an Alcoholic Beverage Permit
Those who wish to sell alcohol as part of their business must obtain a permit from the state Alcohol & Tobacco Commission (ATC). Depending on the type of business that wishes to sell the alcohol, a processor from the ATC can be contacted to determine whether that type of license is available in that area of the state. The population of the town or city determines a quota of how many alcohol licenses can be granted. If the quota is already filled, options for buying a license from existing businesses that wish to sell their licenses are presented. After it is determined that the desired license is available, the ATC will send the appropriate application that must be completed by the business owner and returned back to the ATC.

Representatives of the business must appear at a local board meeting, where a panel of four individuals makes the decision to allow for the permit or decide against it. Three of
these individuals are appointed residents of the local community and one is a member of the Indiana State Excise Police. It is at this board meeting where individuals and coalitions must bring their concerns about the addition or transition of an alcohol outlet. With enough support, a community has the potential to stop a business from obtaining the permit and limit the alcohol outlet density of that area. An appeal from either side can be made to the Alcohol and Tobacco Commission within 15 days of the local board's decision.

**Presenting an Effective Argument**

A general and effective approach that can be utilized at the local board meetings may include these following four steps:

1) Provide proof that there is no need of another alcohol outlet within the area. List other vendors and emphasize the current availability of alcohol, particularly in close proximity to the proposed business.

2) Provide proof that there is no desire from community members for the establishment. These community members should represent various organizations, such as schools, churches and other religious groups, and other business owners so that the board may know that different parts of the community exemplify a united opinion.

3) Show that a large number of people share the same concern of limiting alcohol outlet density in the community. Petitions are one way to do this.

4) Since the committee is told to put greater emphasis on those who live or work within 1000 feet of the establishment, having those people speak out will heavily impact the decision.

**Impacting Your Community**

While there is limited data on causation, multiple studies show correlations of higher alcohol outlet density to higher rates of drinking and its secondary problems, including assault. Combining the efforts of community health departments and community coalitions can prove advantageous towards policy change of alcohol outlet density. Health departments may provide a geospatial information system (GIS), data on alcohol problems within their respective communities, and help to track outcomes. Coalitions can contribute by advocating for policy change and involving important community figures such as city officials, healthcare workers, and volunteers. Together, they can influence local policy makers to limit alcohol outlet density.

**References**

