

H.288 - Liquor Liability Testimony
Alex Crothers, Higher Ground
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I appreciate the time and focus this committee is giving this critical issue. I am the founder and co-owner of Higher Ground and Higher Ground Presents. We have been producing and promoting arts and entertainment throughout Vermont for 25 years.

I operate a similar business that promotes the arts in Portland, ME. I have been trying to get to the bottom of why Vermont's liquor liability rates and availability is so different than that of Maine's for a number of years. By way of comparison, the cost for the same liquor liability coverage we have in Maine is 8-times higher in Vermont. And Vermont is almost 4-times more expensive than New York. At the core of the issue is Vermont's ISO rating, which is directly impacted by our dram shop laws. ISO ratings of Vermont and neighboring states is below:

State	ISO Rating
ME	4
RI	6
NY	6
NH	7
VT	10

Vermont is an outlier, and Alabama is the only other state that has an ISO rating of 10. Everyone who holds a liquor license in the State of VT is impacted by this poor ISO rating. That includes the Flynn in Burlington, the Paramount in Rutland, The Stone Church in Brattleboro, Levitt AMP in St. Johnsbury. Not to mention every brewery, distillery, ski area, and village pub.

I think it's worth mentioning for those not familiar with some of the installed guiderails in the state that there's a mandatory Department of Liquor and Lottery training that all staff associated with a liquor license must take every two years to stay compliant. This includes bartenders, managers, security staff, owners, etc.

Please amend our statute so that Vermont is more inline with states such as Maine. Needless to say, this cost has become untenable. As minimum, it results in substantially higher prices for the customer (and in my case, erodes what is available to pay artists). At worse, it's shuttering businesses that remain fragile post pandemic.

I thank the committee again and its members for the opportunity to tell my story. I appreciate the time and consideration on this critical issue.