



H.313: Sale of Alcoholic Beverages for Off-Premises Consumption Provision

Amy Spear, Vice President of Tourism

Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs (April 9, 2021)

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce represents 1,200 members statewide, including hundreds of tourism and hospitality members. Informed by routine engagement with our membership and our partners Vermont Independent Restaurants and the National Restaurant Association, we maintain a knowledgeable perspective on issues impacting Vermont's hospitality industry.

Vermont's restaurants have been public health partners as we have worked to combat the pandemic. As a result of pandemic related restrictions, restaurants have been operating at severely depressed business levels for over a year now. While there is excitement surrounding our path ahead as unveiled in Vermont Forward, restaurants are anticipating depressed business levels into 2022.

Having a better understanding of the path that is ahead, continuing the sale of alcoholic beverages for off-premises consumption will be a helpful tool for recovery. While not a cure-all, the off-premises provision as outlined in H.313 will help the industry recoup some lost revenue. For the last year, operators have tuned into press conferences with bated breath, waiting to see what would or would not be changed; sometimes with 24-hours' notice.

A formal extension of the current pandemic-allowed alcoholic beverages to-go provisions would allow for a wind-down period of this service that licensees have provided, and customers have come to expect. Additionally, just as restaurants have been partners with the state in the public health response to the pandemic; licensees are educated partners implementing and enforcing liquor laws and regulations. With that in mind, restaurants are supportive of the labeling requirements as outlined.

Looking at the trend of the sale of alcoholic beverages for off-premises consumption, consumer demand for the service was growing prior to the arrival of the pandemic. According to a National Restaurant Association survey in 2019, 56% of all adults said they would order drinks with their to-go order from a restaurant, if permitted. Without a doubt, the pandemic has accelerated this trend.

We thank the Committee and look forward to remaining a resource on these issues.