

2026 02 05 comments to Government Operations Committee

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<https://legislature.vermont.gov/committee/agenda/2026/3207>

My name is Marielle Matthews and I'm here to offer comments on best practices for protection of public health in relation to alcohol and some of the bills in front of the committee this morning. I work in public health focus is on subfield of health behavior, which is essentially the science of health-related decision making. I've spent several years working with health departments, law enforcement, and community organizations across the country around public health policies related to age-restricted substances or items, such as alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, lottery, etc. I work at the local level now, and have previously worked at the national level, including for a national consultancy with the state of Vermont as a client, helping to guide the process of on the ground data collection of built environment factors that affect health outcomes in Vermont, including for factors that affect population level risk for substance use disorders.

My full time role is with the Winooski Partnership for Prevention, an organization that works to prevent substance use disorders in the community, where Representative Kate Nugent is Executive Director when she's not doing legislative work. However, I'm here today in a personal capacity, not representing any organization, just as a Vermonter who is connected to this topic, and I am volunteering my time. If you have further questions on these comments, you can reach me at matthewspublichealthconsulting at gmail dot com.

I want to offer appreciation for both the committee members and the alcohol industry members for their insights today. I am someone who consumes alcohol and I am protected by many of the current regulations that are in place, some of which were described by the industry representatives here today. That is something that goes unrecognized, but honestly the comments I heard today describe public health interventions many of which are working, especially Ryan's comments about being part of the workforce that implements recalls, cleans draught lines, etc. I want to offer sincere appreciation for those interventions from a consumer's perspective.

I am a consumer who is walking that line of monitoring my health, trying my hardest to maintain health, and consuming alcohol. However, I know from my public health background that what matters more than my internal attributes and motivations are the environmental factors around me that are predictive of both my behaviors and my health outcomes.

H.647, subsection 224 fourth class licenses

I have some comments on tastings, but I think I need to ask some general questions about tastings currently. I have two questions.

First, my reading of the [current regulations in chapter 7 VSA subsection 224](#) around tastings leads me to conclude the tastings referred to in this bill are free. Is that correct?

Second, my understanding from the existing regulations around tastings is that the current limits are two ounces of wine, beer or RTDs with a total of 8 ounces for a tasting and one quarter ounce of spirits or fortified wines per person up to a total of one ounce for a tasting. Is that correct?

The [real cost per drink in Vermont is \\$2.33 per drink](#) in health expenditures related to alcohol, so that needs to be factored in to the considerations for free drinks (during recorded testimony, I said \$2.33, which is also from this site, but from a previous year and the cost has now increased to \$2.49 per drink).

With that understanding, my comments are that free alcohol should be limited, 8 ounces for a tasting at varied ABVs at a farmers market is too much, would prefer that the tasting limit be set in US standard drinks, and that money be required for more than 5 ounces. Consider that a standard drink of a 5% ABV beer is 12 ounces, a 7% beer is 8 ounces, an 11% wine is 5 ounces, and 15% Ready To Drink cocktail is 4 ounces (see examples of ABV in RTDs – 20% [here](#) and [here](#), 14% [here](#), 13% [here](#), 12.5% [here](#), 9.3% [here](#)). Counsel stated after this testimony that VT caps RTDs at 12% ABV for reference, which would be a 5 ounce standard drink, rather than 4 ounce). At these ABVs, you're potentially serving more than one free drink at a farmers market. Public health best practice is to not serve any alcohol without exchange of money, for several reasons, but knowing that there is public interest and business interest in having tastings, I think you can find a compromise that doesn't endanger people's health ([APHA 2019](#), [Johns Hopkins SPH 2025](#)). I have the same concerns for the other tasting venues and amounts listed in part B- 16 ounces might be appropriate if it's a light beer, but otherwise I think you would want to keep a tasting to no more than *half* of a standard drink. Twelve ounces of wine is more than 2 standard drinks, and 12 ounces of an RTD cocktail, depending on the ABV could be up [to 3 standard drinks](#).

On subsection 271, I don't have any comment, but a curiosity on how this would affect compliance checks for DLL, in particular undercover buy efforts and responsible serving trainings for staff, so those are just two considerations.

Moving on to H655, there was one proposal on removing the time restrictions for alcohol sales, and I'm guessing that the committee may be aware that this could affect crime rates ([Trangenstein et al. 2018](#)) . I'm not clear on what the hours of permitted sale now would be or if you're suggesting that that be up to the retailer. When considering

the intersection of alcohol and crime, hours of sale restrictions are actually the most effective intervention in reducing crime ([Hahn et al. 2013](#)). If we want to control state and municipal costs for law enforcement, emergency response, and incarceration, I would urge the committee to maintain hours of sale restrictions or even go in the direction of implementing tighter hours of sale for both on-premise and off-premise sales. From a public health perspective, while we see increases in crime with both types of establishments, off-premise sales tend to have stronger associations with crimes committed in private such as sexual violence, homicide, and child abuse. Off-premise sales are also typically how underage folks gain access to alcohol. A study from [2024](#) that was specific to reducing service hours for on-premise consumption from a last call of 2am to a last call of 10pm found a *51% immediate drop in homicides in the surrounding area in the first month, followed by a 23 percent decline in all violent crimes in the surrounding area in the following year. Homicide rates continued to drop by 40 percent* in the year that followed as well ([Rosen et al. 2024](#)). This is notable because there's actually more service control at on-premise sites than off-premise, so increasing hours of sale for off-premise is something to be very cautious about.

On H 672 I have no comment.

On H 832, subsection 224 – I'm unclear about the selling products without charge, I'm hoping this means on credit, and that this is not a mechanism for free alcohol to flow around the community. On subsection 225 ensure that there is enough time for any special training to happen – one day approval period seems short to me. Special events can be instances where consistent carding is more difficult, so it's important to include that provision.