

Know When to Say When:

Recommended Criteria in Deciding Whether to Introduce, Co-Sponsor, Hear or Otherwise Support Alcohol Promotion Legislation

We are deeply concerned with the annual package of legislation promoting the use of alcohol. While none of these bills may appear that damaging when examined individually, the harm is apparent when you consider the *cumulative* impact of so many bills that have been enacted year after year along these lines (or what has been openly referred to during floor debates as “alcohol creep.”)

We therefore ask legislators to evaluate such proposals along these lines before deciding whether to sponsor, co-sponsor, hear or otherwise support such measures:

1. Does the proposal further “normalize” the use of alcohol in everyday, atypical situations?

It is well established that community norms have a major impact on youth behavior. Much of the substance abuse prevention efforts are therefore aimed at providing and encouraging fun youth activities that don’t involve the use of alcohol – demonstrating people can have fun without using alcohol or other drugs.

Unfortunately, legislation that now promotes the public consumption of alcohol in such places as grocery stores, farmers markets, day spas, wedding boutiques and theatres sets a contrary community norm for our young people. Further expansion along these lines needs to be stopped.

2. Does the proposal further diminish what ought to be a bright line between drinking and driving?

The law enforcement, public safety message is “don’t drink and drive.” Legislation such as that noted above sends a message that “it is okay to drink a little bit and drive,” since in most instances people will be driving after consuming the alcohol in question.

The danger in these mixed messages is that even adults have a hard time trying to make such distinctions – as evidenced by the number of DUI and vehicular homicide crimes. Giving this message to our youth is even worse.

3. Does this proposal needlessly interfere with people who are trying to recover from alcoholism?

People in recovery have zero tolerance for alcohol. A critical method for recovery is “structure,” or simply staying away from alcohol and the temptation to resume use.

Unfortunately, recent legislation now permits alcoholics to be offered drinks while grocery shopping, visiting convenience stores (where the smell of alcohol is now available via growler refilling), visiting farmers markets or even going out for dinner (when it is now legal for patrons to be offered a sample drink without having even indicated a desire for any alcoholic beverage.)

4. Will enactment of the proposal open the door to future expansion along the lines in question?

Keep in mind that alcohol promotion legislation is ever-expanding, so allowing one form of expansion inevitably leads to the proposal of others along the same lines. Grocery store sampling thus lead to sampling in farmers markets and restaurants, for instance.

Please watch for and discourage future sampling legislation or proposals to expand convenience store growlers from beer/cider to wine, for example.

5. Will enactment of the proposal further burden the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board?

The WSLCB now has to regulate and enforce the growing pieces of alcohol legislation enacted every session and now must also take up marijuana. Enforcement/regulation is at the “fatigue” point (and in terms of marijuana access/promotion proposals we need to learn from and avert our past problems with alcohol legislation).

6. What about the overall societal costs (police, medical, first responders, treatment, detox) associated with alcohol abuse? Who is to pay the bills that come with ever-increasing alcohol access and promotion?

And the related question is whether the alcohol industry really suffers from a lack of advertising, promotion and product availability that really makes this legislation necessary.

Thank you for your consideration of these general points and we will be conveying separately any particular positions we may have on specific proposals as they are introduced.

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[Excessive drinking costs U.S. \\$2 per drink](#)