

Testimony of John T. Coats, II
Pastor, Metropolitan Church of God in Christ and
President, Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Columbus and Vicinity
before the Ohio House Commerce and Labor Committee

Chair Stein, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Minority Member Lepore-Hagan and members of the Ohio House Commerce and Labor Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify against the amendments expanding liquor license access in Sub. Senate Bill 102. Our organization represents thousands of parishioners in Central Ohio of varying denominations. While each of us has his or her own opinions regarding the sale and consumption of alcohol, we have all seen the negative effects on families and communities when alcohol is sold and consumed irresponsibly. Making it available on all days and at all times of day is a recipe for increased pain and suffering in many communities.

While we are opposed to sweeping changes that make alcohol more widely available as we see in Sub. Senate Bill 102, we are specifically opposed to four provisions of the bill. We do not want to see liquor permit hours lowered to 5:00 a.m. nor Sunday liquor sales hours increased from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. We do not see the need to allow unrestricted alcohol advertising on the internet and otherwise as it unduly influences the young and vulnerable. And we do not want to see a weakening of the current process necessary for a permit holder to expand alcohol sales to include Sundays.

Proponents of alcohol sales have said that Sunday should be treated like any other day. It is my fervent intention that it never be so. While it is the Lord's Day for our members and others of the Christian faith, Sunday has long held a special place for all. It is a day of peace, which can be seen in lower Sunday crime statistics in Columbus and elsewhere. It is also a day of rest, where even most businesses selling and serving alcohol operate at reduced hours, and many choose not to operate at all, even when they have the option of doing so. Sunday is a good day, and in many communities, limited alcohol availability makes it a better day.

We understand that voters in particular neighborhoods currently have the right to decide whether or not alcohol sales can be expanded to include Sundays. Many have supported these sales, and many have rejected them. We believe it right and proper that the onus on liquor permit holders in terms of signatures and otherwise be preserved. We believe changing it represents an attempt by the State of Ohio to step in and to tell us what's right for our people and for our neighborhoods. The process put into place in which a vendor of alcohol can get permission from immediate neighbors to sell on Sunday is the appropriate approach for those seeking to increase alcohol availability. Many have done so. This process encourages such vendors to pay greater attention to their neighbors and the impact their business has upon them. It encourages accountability, and that's a good thing. This legislative body should not weaken it.

Reject Sub. Senate Bill 102 and the expansion of alcohol sales. Please consider these thoughts as you deliberate, and thank you again for the opportunity to make our voices heard.

Sincerely,
Pastor John T. Coats, II