While much of the crime data police collect may not appear to be related to alcohol consumption, much less the density of alcohol outlets, the research tells a different story. As demonstrated in the studies below, crimes such as domestic violence, assault, burglary, grand theft and others are linked to the availability of alcohol in a community. It would therefore be a mistake to minimize the relevance of such data when making decisions about whether to permit additional alcohol outlets in a neighborhood.

**Violence and Crime**

The relationship between alcohol outlet density and violent crime has been well documented. Communities with 100 or more alcohol outlets and a population of 50,000 or more can expect an annual increase of 2.5 violent crimes each year for every alcohol outlet added in the area.\(^1\) Criminologists studying the distribution of violent crimes have found on-site alcohol outlets such as bars and restaurants were among the “hottest” of the “hot spots” for such incidents.\(^4\) In one large U.S. city, researchers found city blocks with bars had higher rates of assaults, robberies and rapes than other blocks, even after the analysis accounted for the effects of unemployment and poverty.\(^3\)

Researchers also found these so-called “wetter” neighborhoods have higher levels of public drunkenness and disturbing the peace violations along with calls for police services.\(^6\) Additional support for the causal relationship comes from research showing violence and other problems decrease when alcohol availability goes down.\(^5,6,8\)

Increased homicide rates also are prevalent in regions with high densities of off-site alcohol outlets such as liquor stores.\(^9,10\) One study of urban neighborhoods in New Orleans found a 10 percent higher outlet density was associated with a 2.4 percent higher homicide rate. According to the researcher, this was true even after considering other factors such as the percentage of unemployed, young male residents and the number of households headed by unmarried people.\(^11\)

**Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault**

New findings suggest domestic violence and sexual assault in a neighborhood may rise as the number of liquor licenses in the area increases. Even after accounting for socioeconomic factors that could influence domestic violence, a study in Maryland showed that a doubling of the density of liquor stores was associated with a nine percent increase in the rate of reported domestic violence. While alcohol is certainly not the only factor in domestic violence and sexual assault, researchers concluded that reducing the incidence of domestic violence in certain areas may be as simple as spreading out the stores that are allowed to sell alcohol.\(^5\)

Several studies of college students also found a correlation between alcohol use and sexual assault. Specifically, the studies showed an increased likelihood of victimization among drinking and intoxicated women.\(^11,12\) In a study of 52 women bar drinkers, 85 percent of the women reported some form of nonsexual physical aggression. Thirty-three percent reported an attempted or completed rape occurred after drinking in a bar.\(^11,12\) The risk of nonsexual victimization was not greater for women who went to bars frequently, but the risk of sexual victimization increased.

**Alcohol-related traffic collisions**

The most frequently reported consequences of high outlet density are alcohol-related collisions. According to a study of 72 cities in California, for every one percent increase in outlet density there was a .54 percent increase in alcohol-related crashes. Thus, if a city of 50,000 had 100 alcohol outlets, the residents would experience an additional 2.7 crashes for each new bar or liquor store.\(^1\) Some studies indicate the rate of crashes can be reduced by responsible beverage service training programs, but the level of risk still is high when outlet density exceeds the acceptable levels of saturation.\(^12\)

This is of special concern to communities in Ventura County. According to data from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS), the cities of Ventura, Oxnard, and Thousand Oaks ranked 13, 14, and 17 respectively out of 47 cities in this population group for drivers under the age of 21 who were arrested for DUI. Drunk driving arrests often take place at night, as bars are closing and highways become crowded with patrons who have been drinking.\(^11\) This is confirmed by the Place of Last Drink survey data, collected from February 2004 through May 2005, that show about 44% of all participants in drinking driver programs had taken their last drink at a bar, club, or restaurant.\(^11\) Analysis of data collected from February 2002 to May 2004 on young people, aged 18-25 years of age, shows over one-third of DUI...
offenders had their last drink in these settings. The seriousness of this problem is underscored by California Highway Patrol statistics showing members of this age group incurred 540 serious injuries and 36 deaths related to alcohol in the period 2000 - 2003. vii

**Underage Drinking**

A study of three cities in Northern California showed communities with high outlet density have significantly higher levels of underage drinking as well as gang-related behavior, drug sales and sexual promiscuity among youth. According to the authors, if alcohol outlets define the physical and social environment for youth, then they are more likely to engage in such activities.

A strong correlation was established between the age of a young person’s first drink and a variety of personal and social problems. These include getting involved in fights, suffering personal injury, unprotected sexual activity and drinking problems later in life. vii, xvii It can be especially problematic when young people grow up in an environment with alcohol advertisements on every street corner.

**Economic Decline**

According to city planning departments, the most common complaints regarding alcohol outlets are related to noise, traffic or loitering. These problems may seem minor, but over time, they change the character of a neighborhood. As a result, those who regularly visit may change their routines, and even those living nearby may start to avoid the area. xiii

This phenomenon is consistent with research showing over-concentration of alcohol outlets often is part of a neighborhood’s broad economic and social disintegration. When an area becomes oversaturated with bars and liquor stores, it loses its economic base as well as its diversity and becomes less attractive to residents and potential retail customers. xiv Accordingly, a proliferation of alcohol outlets can be considered a symptom of economic decline and a factor that worsens such decline.

**Conclusion**

In light of this research, appeals by community organizations and residents to limit and/or decrease the number of alcohol outlets in their neighborhoods should not be construed as anti-business. To the contrary, crime and over concentration are barriers to attracting new businesses and commercial enterprises that can promote economic revitalization and development. Any new license applications in oversaturated areas should be considered with caution. xix, xx

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This publication was prepared by the Institute for Public Strategies as part of a series from Ventura County Limits, a project of the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department.