

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5643

As of February 18, 2019

Title: An act relating to theater licenses.

Brief Description: Modifying theater license provisions.

Sponsors: Senators King, Palumbo, Honeyford, Keiser, Walsh, Saldaña and Nguyen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Labor & Commerce: 2/18/19.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Removes the limit on the number of seats allowed and the tabletop dining requirement for certain spirits, beer, and wine theater licensees, under specified conditions.
- Removes the maximum four screen limitation on the beer and/or wine theater license.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & COMMERCE

Staff: Richard Rodger (786-7461)

Background: Certain theaters are authorized to obtain a license allowing the theater to sell spirits, beer, and wine at retail for on-premise consumption. To be eligible for a spirits, beer, and wine theater license, the theater must:

- have no more than 120 seats per screen;
- prepare, cook, and serve complete meals; and
- provide tabletop accommodations for in-theater dining.

Certain theaters are authorized to obtain a license allowing the theater to sell beer, strong beer, and wine at retail for on-premise consumption. To be eligible for this theater license, the theater may not have more than four movie screens.

If minors are allowed in the theater, the theater must submit an alcohol control plan to the Liquor and Cannabis Board for approval. Any person serving alcohol must have completed a mandatory alcohol server training program. The maximum fines and suspensions for

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violations involving minors or failure to follow an alcohol control plan are doubled for theaters.

Summary of Bill: The criteria for issuing a spirits, beer, and wine theater license is revised to remove the requirements for 120 seats or fewer and tabletop dining requirements, under specified conditions. The conditions include:

- distinctive glassware;
- limits on the size of the glassware;
- drinks containing not more than three ounces of spirits, which must be one hundred proof or less;
- a separate bar and lounge area;
- a prohibition on temporary service locations;
- a prohibition on promotions that encourage intoxication or drinking contests;
- required age verification at the time of ordering; and
- training requirements for all managers and staff who interact with guests.

Theaters with no more than four screens and tabletop accommodations for in-theater dining are not required to have a separate bar and lounge area and may provide service from temporary locations.

The theater license authorizing the sale of beer, strong beer, and wine is no longer limited to theaters with up to four screens.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The bill actually creates an incentive for theater owners to regulate the consumption of alcohol in theaters. Currently, customers sneak alcohol into the theaters, but since we are not licensed to serve it our staff are not trained to recognize or handle these issues. Licensing us to serve comes with the duty and liability to regulate the customers activities. Our company is already allowed to serve alcohol in 35 states plus the District of Columbia. This is a way to keep theaters relevant and bring adults back to our businesses. We have successfully served alcohol at 305 locations, over a period of 22 years. Our data shows that only 10 percent of the adult customers consume beverages with alcohol at our currently authorized theaters, and they consume an average of only 1.1 drinks each. We have spent millions of dollars renovating our theaters and this bill will help us keep our adult customers. Teenagers do not go to the movies nearly as often as they used to go.

CON: We were originally opposed to any alcohol in movie theaters and continue to oppose this type of legislation. The bill further liberalizes the alcohol rules and we believe it will result in substantial advertising of alcohol in the theaters.

OTHER: We view these theaters as having a low risk of over service. We are concerned with the risk of pass-offs to minors. Currently 54 theaters qualify to sell alcohol and the bill could add another 188. We do not aggressively enforce the current theater provisions as we do not want to shine flashlights on people in the movie theaters.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Curtis King, Prime Sponsor; Raymond Hallett, Hallett Cinemas LLC; Frank Lewis, AMC Theatres.

CON: Seth Dawson, Washington Association for Substance Abuse Prevention.

OTHER: Chris Thompson, Liquor and Cannabis Board.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.