



# NEEDHAM BOARD OF HEALTH



March 20, 2023

Dear Needham League of Women Voters,

The Needham Board of Health is charged by the Massachusetts General Court to protect the public’s health under its authority to make reasonable health regulations<sup>[1]</sup> and to “examine all nuisances, sources of filth and causes of sickness.”<sup>[2]</sup> Although the Board of Health does not issue alcohol licenses as we do with tobacco, we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the second question of the April 11, 2023, Town Election ballot: *Question 2 to Expand the Number of Alcohol Sales Licenses*.

**We will outline our reasoning below, but the Needham Board of Health does not support the expansion of alcohol availability (through additional licenses and through longer hours for alcohol sales), and it urges Needham voters to vote No on Ballot Question #2 on April 11, 2023.**

\* \* \* \* \*

There is evidence that the harmful use of alcohol is a causal factor in more than 200 disease and injury conditions. <sup>[3]</sup> **Alcohol misuse is one of the leading causes of preventable deaths, and costs the Commonwealth and our communities significant harm, physically, socially, and economically.** <sup>[3]</sup> While the impacts of problem drinking are staggering, there are many public health interventions that can be utilized to ensure public safety and population health.

“The Community Preventive Services Task Force, working under the auspices of the CDC, similarly recommends as effective, evidence-based approaches availability strategies that include **regulating the number and concentration of alcohol retailers in an area and maintaining limits on days and hours when alcohol may be sold.** Complementary strategies include licensee trainings and compliance checks.” <sup>[4]</sup>

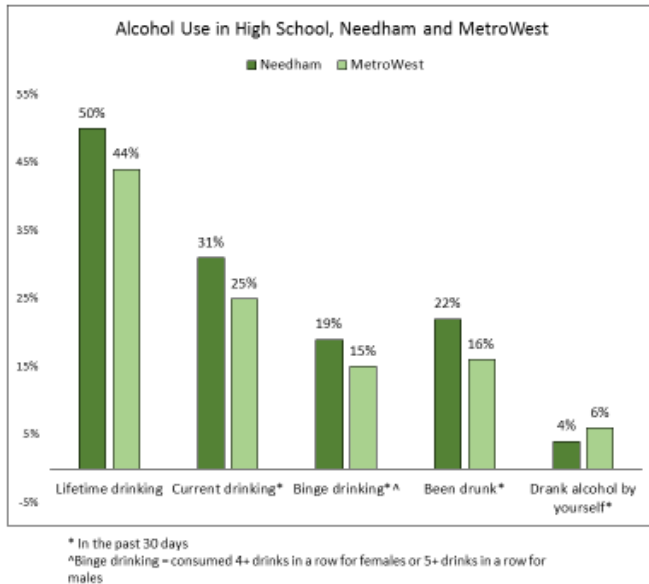


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The 2021 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey data captures the rates of alcohol use among Needham youth in grades 9 – 12:

## Youth Access to Alcohol and Alcohol Use



- Percentage of NHS students who report using alcohol in their lifetime increases substantially through High School:
  - 9<sup>th</sup>: 34%
  - 10<sup>th</sup>: 43%
  - 11<sup>th</sup>: 61%
  - 12<sup>th</sup>: 69%
- Among 12<sup>th</sup> graders who reported drinking in the past 30 days:
  - 14% bought it with a fake I.D.
  - 8% bought it without a fake I.D.
  - 29% reported someone they know 21+ gave it to them/purchased it for them
  - 4% asked a stranger to buy it for them
- 12.1% of Needham HS students rode in a car driven by someone who had been drinking in the past 30 days
- 10.9% reported ever living with someone who was having a problem with alcohol/drug use

We come to you today, as a Board of Health, to ask for your support in protecting the health of the entire Needham community. If passed, the second question on the Town Election ballot allows an 75% increase in the number of off-premise alcohol licenses in Needham.

In towns where liquor licensing is not covered by a special act, Massachusetts General Laws c.138, §17 allows for one “All Alcohol” package store license and one “Wine and Malt Only” package store license for every 5,000 residents of the town. Based on Needham’s population, switching to the quota system in Massachusetts General Laws c.138, §17 would **allow the Select Board to issue seven All Alcohol package store licenses and seven Wine and Malt Only package store licenses**. This would allow Needham an increase of 6 off-premise licenses, 1 of which would be allowed as “All Alcohol” and 5 allowed at “Wine and/or Malt Only” package stores. The Town has prepared and posted information for voters on the [Town of Needham website](#).

There is a very large body of public health research documenting that increased access to alcohol is associated with increased consumption, which poses the risk of increased downstream consequences including increased incidents of violence and alcohol-impaired driving. Policies that govern where, when, and how alcohol is available – including the number, placement and density of alcohol outlets, the days, and times of sale - affect the extent and severity of alcohol problems a population will experience. <sup>4</sup>

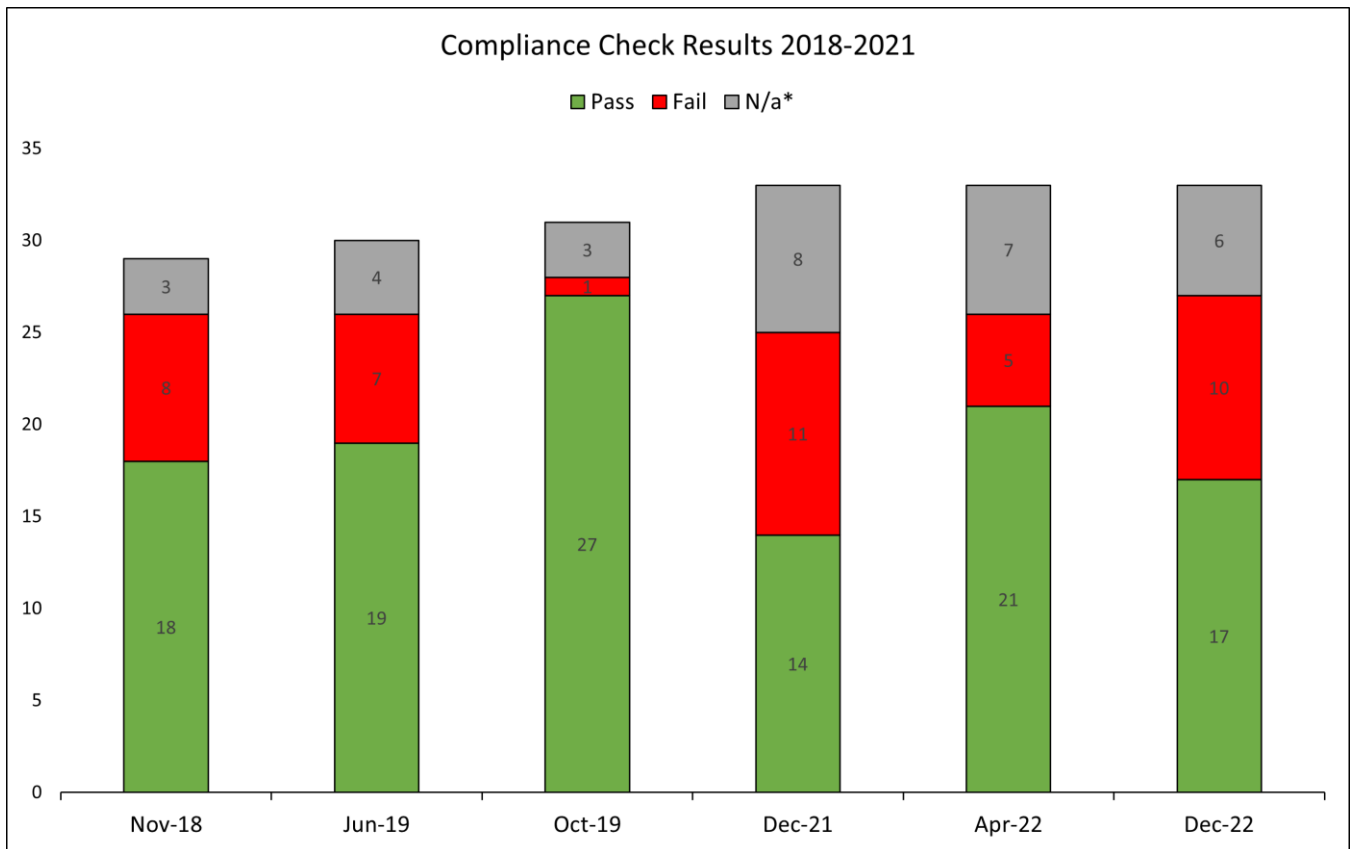


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While the Board of Health is committed to working collaboratively with Town leadership on ensuring regulations that serve the best interests of the residents and community, the Board of Health does not support the current efforts to expand availability of alcohol, whether at the ballot through a vote to expand the number of licenses in Needham or through amendments to the Select Board’s existing alcohol regulations which would allow for expanded hours for alcohol sales. **At this time, we believe that the Select Board should not issue additional alcohol licenses, nor expand the hours for alcohol sales, until the regular and reliable compliance of existing licensees is assured.**

**Needham data from 2018 to 2022 related to alcohol compliance check violations, listed below, calls attention to the chronic rate of sales to minor violations.**



\*N/a includes businesses that were not accessible at the time of the check, not open for business yet, or had a suspended license

Thank you for your review of this letter and for your support and advocacy on behalf of all Needham residents.



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Sincerely,  
The Needham Board of Health

Kathleen Ward Brown, ScD

Edward Cosgrove, PhD

Stephen Epstein, MD, MPP

Tejal Gandhi, MD, MPH

Robert Partridge, MD, MPH

CC: Timothy McDonald, Director of Health & Human Services, Town of Needham

### References:

1. M.G.L. Ch. 111, s.31, available at:  
<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXVI/Chapter111/Section31>
2. M.G.L. Ch. 111, s.122, available at:  
<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXVI/Chapter111/Section122>
3. WHO. Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health 2018. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO Press, 2018, p.vii. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/274603/9789241565639-e....> Accessed December 8, 2020.
4. Jernigan, D. H., & Zhou, X. (2022). Alcohol, Health and Safety in Massachusetts. *Boston University School of Public Health Department of Health Law, Policy, and Management.*