



# **Governments should use zoning to limit liquor stores, Hopkins researchers say**

## **Study cites Baltimore as leader in the effort**

By Andrea K. Walker, The Baltimore Sun

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The use of zoning laws have become a powerful way to reduce the number of liquor stores in cities, but too few government officials are utilizing the tool, Johns Hopkins public health researchers said in a new report.

The researchers from the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public have created a guide to advise governments of the regulatory power they have to combat alcohol abuse.

They hope the report, published in the journal Preventing Chronic Disease, will bring more attention to the issue.

Studies have found that reducing the number of places where people can buy alcohol can help curb excessive drinking in communities. Los Angeles County researchers said that one additional liquor store was associated with 3.4 acts of violence a year. New Orleans researchers found that a 10 percent increase in liquor stores would correlate to a 2 percent increase in the homicide rate.

"So many health departments are unaware that they can influence alcohol-related problems through the planning and zoning process," said David Jernigan, lead author of the report and director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth.

Excessive alcohol use is the third leading cause of preventable death in the United States and is the cause of 80,000 deaths each year, Jernigan said.

Jernigan cited Baltimore as a good example of a place using zoning to combat alcoholism.

About 100 stores throughout the city would be forced to stop selling alcohol under new rules being considered as part of the most extensive change in zoning regulations in 40 years.

Baltimore officials, including Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and Health Commissioner Oxiris Barbot, have said that they think reducing the concentration of liquor stores and taverns will improve health outcomes and safety.

The code would prohibit liquor stores from being located in the middle of a residential block and redefine what qualifies as a tavern. For example more than 50 percent of a store's average daily alcohol receipts would need to come from sales consumed on premises to qualify as tavern.

Liquor store owners have said the city is discriminating against them and that their stores are not the cause of the city's health and crime problems. The proposed zoning has passed the planning commission and is now before the City Council.

"Baltimore is a leader on this issue," Jernigan said.

Many cities in California have also utilized zoning to limit liquor stores, Jernigan said. The report also highlighted Omaha, Neb., which was prompted to use regulatory power after problems with a liquor store in one neighborhood. Nearly 2,000 calls were made to police in 11 months because of incidents within a half mile of the liquor store.

The Hopkins report outlined four ways states and localities can thin out the density of liquor stores in their communities.

It said cities can limit the number of alcohol outlets per geographic area or limit the number of stores based on population. Zoning laws could also be used to establish a cap on the percentage of retail stores based on the total number of businesses in an area. Municipalities could also limit where alcohol outlets are located as well as their operating hours. Land-use powers can be used to limit and deny certain places from selling alcohol.