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NC General Assembly Program Evaluation Division,  
Attn: L. Carol Shaw, Principal Evaluator  
Legislative Office Building, Suite 100  
300 N. Salisbury Street  
Raleigh, NC 27603-5925

Dear Dr. Shaw:

I am writing on behalf of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Drug Free Coalition who, at its monthly meeting this morning, voted to communicate to you **our very strong opposition to privatizing** the sale of spirit alcohol in North Carolina.

We oppose the privatization proposal because we believe that it will increase the availability of spirit alcohol to underage youth at a time when Acting US Surgeon General, Dr. Moritsugu, declared underage drinking as a National Health Crisis. Despite some popular myth, adolescent alcohol use is not an acceptable rite of passage; it is a serious threat to adolescent development and health. We have an obligation in North Carolina to control access to alcohol, especially minors. Since we are currently a control state, North Carolina is in a good position to address the problem. Privatization would only make access easier, exacerbating the problem.

We urge you to keep in mind that the purpose of control is to make liquor available to those adults who choose to drink responsibly-but NOT to promote the sale of liquor. Privatization will only **promote** alcohol consumption through advertizing and it is well-known that advertizing is especially effective with youth.

Do we really want the shelves of every grocery store, drug store or convenience store filled with spirits? As it is, these places are sieves allowing easy access to beer and wine by underage drinkers.

- Our coalition has conducted a number of alcohol purchase studies and found that between thirty-five and forty percent of off premise sale establishments in Charlotte sold without checking for identification. We doubt that the situation is different elsewhere in the state. There is little consistency in making ID checks in these establishments and we therefore feel youth access to alcohol would increase under privatization.
- Shoplifting of alcohol would be significantly easier!
- Currently the alcohol of choice is beer, but we doubt it would remain as such with easier access to spirits

We would like to point out that increasing the potential access to underage drinkers will have long-term consequences that will eventually cost the taxpayers of this state more than any increase in revenue might be worth. Here are some important facts about underage drinking that should be part of your evaluation.

- In 2005, the NC Governor's Office estimated that the consequences of underage drinking carried a \$1.2 billion price tag in pain and suffering, work loss and medical costs in our state.
- Teens who drink are 50 times more likely to use cocaine than teens who never consume alcohol.
- Alcohol kills 6 ½ times more teenagers than all other illicit drugs combined
- 40 percent of those who started drinking at age 13 or younger developed alcohol dependence later in life (a costly disease affecting self, family and community). This fact can be illustrated by the research we have conducted since 2000 in the Mecklenburg County jail that consistently found alcohol dependence rates are highest among young arrestees between ages 18 and 20.

The above facts about underage drinking are the conditions today – *when we have control over spirits*. It is our belief that the facts and costs associated with underage drinking will be even greater if the legislature puts the distribution of liquor into private hands for private profit.

We are very pleased with the Mecklenburg ABC Board. The current ABC Board structure at least allows for community responsibility and places a burden on each community to promote responsible drinking and contain underage drinking. This our Board has consistently done. A couple of important aspects about the current structure that would also be lost, in addition to community responsibility, is the statute requirement that 5% of profits must be dedicated to law enforcement and 7% to alcohol education – per Board. That commitment to the community would disappear under privatization and would also negatively impact substance abuse service providers and other recipients of Board funding. In addition, there would be a significant negative impact on enforcement efforts - something that needs to be increased, not decreased. There is nothing in privatization that builds that kind of accountability into the sale process.

In short, privatization of the sale of spirit alcohol would be a major step backward and can only exacerbate the serious problem we already have.

Sincerely,

Paul C. Friday, PhD.  
Chair, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Drug Free Coalition  
Professor of Criminal Justice, UNC Charlotte