

Response ID ANON-GXRH-UWF7-2

Submitted to **CALL FOR EVIDENCE AND VIEWS ON THE LICENSING AND REGISTRATION OF CLUBS (AMENDMENT) BILL**

Submitted on **2021-01-18 17:54:30**

Introduction

What is your name?

Name:

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What is your organisation?

Organisation:

The Helping Hand

Please indicate if you are providing a submission:

on behalf of an organisation or business

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation or business please tell us briefly how it relates to the subject matter of the Bill:

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

I have worked in inner city N Belfast since 1979 and in 1999 helped found an addiction support group called The Helping Hand for the purpose of providing assistance to those suffering from addiction and their families. We have been in operation for 22 years and have had clients from many areas within a 12 mile radius.

I have also worked with the community and its young people since 1979, having started the first youth club in the area in 1982 so am very familiar with the problems of addiction, both drugs and alcohol, and their pattern of development over the last 40 years.

Before entering ministry I studied various branches of biological science in the USA where I received a Masters degree in physiology and a PhD in genetics. This has proved invaluable in my work with those suffering from ill effects associated with addiction.

Though now officially retired I remain still actively involved on a daily basis with my former contacts and community and can speak on their behalf with accuracy based on long experience.

1. The Policy Objectives of the Bill

What are your views on the overall policy objectives? Do you think that the Bill will meet those objectives? If not, why not?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

Prior to the pandemic our local hospitals had 25% of their beds occupied by those suffering from addiction related illnesses. For the first time a few years ago they created a new post of "Alcohol Liaison Nurse" so serious was the problem. Approx. 80% of admissions to Accident and Emergency departments at hospitals on Friday and Saturday nights were due to addiction issues. Often these people exhibited noisy and threatening behaviour necessitating the presence of security staff to ensure safety of medical staff. This is a major reason why there is a constant shortage of senior medical staff. It also endangered the lives of other patients who frequently were bypassed in priority of getting attention.

At the major review of this legislation in 1996 the then NIO minister overruled the vast majority of responses which were opposed to liberalising the licensing laws and introduced sales from supermarkets etc. Prior to this he had been entertained every weekend he was at Stormont by members of the alcohol trade. No redress was possible.

At that time the average age at which a person had their first drink was 13 years, today it is 9 years. Alcohol sold in supermarkets is approximately half the price of that sold in pubs with the result that nearly all of the worst drinking takes place unseen by the public eye at home. In the last 9 months the sales of alcohol have increased by 70% in monetary terms which based on the fact that nearly all has been sold through off-licences equates to a doubling of the amount consumed. NI society has a major alcohol problem that needs to be reduced rather than exacerbated as the effect of this Bill would result in.

2. Easter Opening Hours and Additional Permitted Opening Hours

The removal of restrictions at Easter [Clauses 1 & 23]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

At the previous law's introduction the alcohol industry promised that it would respect the special solemnity and decorum associated with Good Friday and Easter as well as Christmas Day. It used this pledge to help smooth the way for other concessions. It is now pushing to break these promises. This will not only detract from the traditional Irish respect for both these religious occasions but will also intrude on what are important family gatherings. It is more important for families to spend time together than for some members to head off to a pub or club and get drunk. Levels of domestic violence over holiday periods are at epidemic levels and are almost always alcohol related. Up to now they have occurred around Christmas and this bill will add the Easter weekend also. This is not a good idea. At Easter there are also traditional parades both by nationalist organisations and the Loyal Orders. These have the potential for unrest and violence and the increased availability of alcohol is almost certain to make the task of the PSNI more difficult and dangerous

Additional permitted hours for certain licensed premises [Clause 2]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

We already have some of the most liberal licensing laws in the world and some of the worst addiction problems in the world. The principle of liberalisation embedded in this Bill is detrimental to the wellbeing of society.

- Providing an extra 30 mins 'drink up' time will result in an increased consumption of alcohol. After a night's drinking people are not mentally capable of rationing the amount they consume. They will continue to drink as long as possible.
- Adding an extra hour will also increase consumption and its inevitable damage to health and increased pressures on the NHS.
- Increased policing costs and manpower needs as well as extended taxi knock off times.
- Pub staffing costs will increase and the only beneficiaries will be the alcohol producing industry.
- Proposed extensions are massive involving every weekend each year plus another 20 occasions.
- The argument re. it boosting tourism is spurious as tourists do not come to NI to spend most of their time drinking alcohol. This is totally different to having a drink with a meal or a social drink of Guinness in a the Crown Bar.

PSNI authorisation for additional permitted hours for smaller pubs [Clause 4]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- Smaller pubs are mainly located in country areas where there is limited taxi provision. - - - Increased hours will result in increased alcohol consumption and more drivers who are 'over the limit' with resultant increased road fatalities.
- NI needs less alcohol consumption not more.
- The level of increase is excessive and will damage individuals, their families and society in general.
- My feedback is that as most smaller pubs are family owned and run they are opposed to these extensions because they will increase family pressures. Many pub owners live in a connected part of the premises.
- Again the only real beneficiary will be the alcohol industry.

“Drinking-up Time” and the Alignment of Alcohol and Entertainment Licences

What are your views on the extension of “drinking-up” time?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- Proposed extensions are massive and excessive involving 104 days/every weekend each year plus another 20 occasions.
- The argument re. it boosting tourism is spurious as tourists do not come to NI to spend most of their time drinking alcohol. This is totally different to having a drink with a meal or a social drink of Guinness in a the Crown Bar.
- Given our already serious problems with addiction this is a foolish and damaging proposal.
- This is only a ploy by the alcohol industry to increase profits at the expense - both financial and physical, of the customer and society as a whole.

What impact do you think it would have on alcohol consumption towards closing time and during ‘drinking up’ time?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- - Providing an extra 30 mins 'drink up' time will most definitely result in an increased consumption of alcohol. After a night's drinking people are not mentally capable of rationing the amount they consume. They will continue to drink as much and as long as possible.
- Adding an extra hour will also increase consumption and its inevitable damage to health and increased pressures on the NHS.
- Increased policing costs and security staff manpower needs as well as extended taxi 'knock off' times. -- Pub staffing costs will increase and the only real beneficiaries will be the alcohol producing industry.

What impact do you think it would have on issues such as anti-social behaviour and crowd dispersal?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

Very definitely both will lead to increased alcohol consumption.

- Customers will be in an increased state of intoxication and there will be resultant problems in returning safely home.
- Women will be increasingly vulnerable to sexual attacks.
- People will be more drunk at an even later hour with associated ant-social behaviour.
- This can only increase demands on security and policing
- Taxi drivers will have increased levels of tiredness with the attendant risks of traffic accidents and disruption to family life.

Do you have any comments on the proposals to align closing time for liquor and entertainment licences [Clause 3]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- Over the years I have helped a number of folks in the music scene who have finished up as alcoholics due to the free alcohol provided to them at pubs and clubs. Often they have spent the rest of the night sleeping on pub benches before being fit to drive home. This has nearly always caused break-up of marriages and alienation from children. Mostly these musicians work part time and have regular jobs to go to the next morning. They are already under extreme pressure and any extension of times will only worsen their situation and damage further the relationship with their employers and families.

4. Supporting Tourism, Special Events and Small Producers

Do you think that the provisions contained within the Bill will have a positive impact on hospitality and/or tourism and in Northern Ireland? If so, how?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- Tourists do not come to NI for alcohol as they have plenty of it available at home.
- A drink with a meal at Easter is acceptable and appropriate and does not have the same impact on society at large as a night's drinking in a pub or club.
- A tourist after a long night's drinking will rarely be in a fit state the next day to appreciate the beauties of our lovely country and is unlikely to want to return or to recommend it to their friends.
- Again this is primarily a ploy by the alcohol industry to boost already massive profits at the expense of our people.

What are your views on the proposals relating to permitted hours for special events [Clauses 6 & 25]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- The proposals are excessive in scale and are open to exploitation and abuse
- They will be nearly impossible to properly police in practice.
- They will increase the already massive problems of addiction in NI
- They will increase problems with anti-social behaviour.
- Alcohol is not an essential part of every special event. It actually reduces the awareness of them and reduces their enjoyment.
- They will only increase the profits of the alcohol industry

**What are your views on the provisions of the Bill that are aimed at supporting small local producers of beer, cider and spirits [Clause 8]?
What impact do you envisage this could have on tourism? Do you feel that the regulatory framework, as outlined in the Bill, is sufficiently robust?**

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- There is a case for small local breweries/distilleries being allowed to serve samples to their visitors.
- Safeguards are needed to prevent abuse and limits per customer must be set and adequately policed.

5. Children and Young People (under the age of 18)

The removal of the requirement of a licensed premises or registered club to hold a children's certificate [Clauses 10 & 26]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- NI already has massive problems with underage drinking.
- Laws need to be tightened up to reduce this problem rather than being relaxed.
- Many premises especially smaller pubs are not suitable for the presence of children
- This Bill will increase under age drinking

Permitting certain premises to hold underage functions; the conditions that must be met; the permitted opening hours; and, proposed enforcement action [Clauses 11 & 27]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- Adequate premises already exist for holding such youth events
- Any extension to other premises associated with the alcohol industry will only be primer for return visits when they are older and worsen the already serious problem of alcoholism.
- No conditions, regulations or proposed enforcement actions can counteract this initial introduction to the alcohol scene.

Permitting the attendance of young people to remain on licensed premises to attend a private function (e.g. a wedding reception) and the proposed conditions that must be met [Clauses 12 & 28]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- Attendance of children with parents at venues serving alcohol already is a common fact of life and usually is without problems at wedding receptions.

The strengthening of the current law around the delivery of alcohol [Clause 9] and the delivery of alcohol to young people [Clause 13]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- Deliveries of alcohol by taxi to the homes of heavy drinkers has been common for years.
- Usually it is because the person being supplied is too intoxicated to go to their nearest off-licence themselves.
- While illegal it is rarely enforced and some taxi depots and/or drivers keep stocks of vodka etc for supplying. Often this is fake vodka with dangerous content.
- It is already nearly impossible to police and the requirement for the recipient at the door to be over 18 years is unenforceable.

The prohibition on self-service and sale of alcohol by vending machines [Clauses 15 & 30]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

_ In my experience self service very rarely occurs and the removal of vending machines is only a token gesture by the alcohol industry which will have negligible effect.

Permitting children and young people to be present in a sporting club to 11:00pm during the summer months (1 June to 31 August) [Clause 29]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

_ - Sporting events which will benefit children almost never happen after 9pm during the summer months

- Bad light prevents play at cricket after 9 pm.
- Such clubs are nearly impossible to police and children in attendance are likely to start underage drinking
- The main effect of the proposal is to familiarise children with the drinking culture to the future benefit of the alcohol industry.
- Result will be an increase in under age drinking
- Alcohol is damaging to health and sporting performance.

Permitting children and young people to attend an awards ceremony in a sporting club one night per calendar year (until 11pm) [Clause 29]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

Provided this is properly safeguarded it should not create problems.

Overall, do you feel the measures are adequate to protect children and young people from alcohol related harm? If not, why not?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- Overall the effect of the measures will be to introduce children to alcohol at an earlier age, create temptation to under age drinking and increase problems with alcoholism in later life.

6. Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol-Related Harm

What impact do you think these measures will have on reducing alcohol consumption and preventing alcohol-related harm?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- None of these proposed measures will have a significant effect on reducing alcohol consumption or preventing alcohol related harm. The alcohol industry knows this.
- Cheap drink promotions work because alcohol is too cheap. Often beer is cheaper than coke. Often they are funded by the alcohol industry and not the off-licence. They are aimed at making people drink more.
- Minimum unit pricing rates are urgently needed similar to those already proving effective in Scotland.
- In store advertising is superfluous as customers still can see trolleys with alcohol on them. Removing adverts will have minimal effect.
- Many supermarkets have minimised the boundary into their drinks department in an effort to encourage more people to drink. There appears to be little enforcement present.

Do you have any other comments in relation to any other aspect of the Bill in relation to alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

The overall effect of this Bill will be to increase significantly the problem of alcoholism in NI. We already have huge problems with both excessive adult consumption as well as under age drinking. The liberalising proposals will make both problems much worse. The few minor concessions such as removal of vending machines are largely irrelevant and will have no significant beneficial effect. The arguments relating to promoting tourism are unlikely to be true. Sadly I have conducted a number of funerals of young people who had committed suicide. In almost every case the victims had consumed alcohol and had lost their reason as a result. No doubt other factors also played a part but alcohol was a major contributory cause. We already have one of the highest suicide rates in the world and this Bill is likely to make it worse.

Alcohol is particularly damaging to the livers of the young as well as to the heart, kidneys and brains. Our NHS was struggling before Covid, partly due to 25% of our hospital beds being occupied by folks with alcohol related illnesses. It will be even more severely impacted by the increasing levels of alcohol consumption facilitated by this bill.

The effects of alcoholism on families is often forgotten. Teenage pregnancies, broken relationships, battered wives, foetal alcohol damaged children, absent fathers and more recently homes with small children where both parents are drunk and children are not properly cared for. I see them all on a regular basis. Our society is in serious trouble through misuse of alcohol and no one seems to care.

7. Regulation, Enforcement, Offences and Penalties

The Bill proposes to allow statutory approval for voluntary industry-led codes of practice in relation to the sale and supply of alcohol in licensed premises and registered clubs [Clauses 19 & 32]. Do you feel these are an effective means of helping to regulate the industry? If not, what alternatives would you suggest?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

Codes of Practice, Regulations and Penalties only mean something when they are properly enforced. This has rarely happened in the past. The Bill proposes greatly extended opening hours and increased venues where alcohol can be sold. These measures will have the effect of stretching PSNI resources even further and increase the difficulty in enforcement. This part of the Bill is likely to be just a "paper exercise" and of no real practical value.

The Bill contains provisions to permit a court, when determining an application for an occasional licence, to impose terms and conditions on the licence with consequences for non-compliance [Clause 18]. What are your views on this?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

What are your views on the measures in the Bill that would require a body corporate (licensee) to notify the courts and police of any change of directorship (within 28 days) [Clause 20]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

Throughout the Bill there are a number of new offences and/or penalties under The Licensing (NI) Order 1996, The Registration of Clubs (NI) Order 1996 and The Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (NI) Order 1985. The Committee would welcome any comments you have in relation to any of these.

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

8. Resource Implications for Certain Organisations/Bodies

(a) The PSNI:

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

PSNI resources will be increasingly stretched . It should not be the task of a Police Officer to ensure that an intoxicated vulnerable young women gets home safely. Very few alternative services are available in situations like this .

b) Health and social services:

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

I work regularly with Social Services and know a little of the pressures they encounter due to alcoholism especially with young mothers. When women were barred from pubs the children were safe. That situation no longer exists and this Bill does nothing to improve the safety and welfare of the young.

Alcohol addiction is classed as an incurable disease and levels are increasing daily with very few resources to cope with it.

My wife worked for many years as a teacher in inner city primary schools and witnessed the appalling increase in children born with severe behavioural and learning disabilities, many related to alcoholism. Usually they are incurable and lifelong while those resulting from alcohol induced gene damage will be passed down to successive generations. Classroom assistants are helpful but not the real answer to this growing problem.

c) Other organisations (please specify):

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

Only a few Addiction support agencies exist in NI. Most operate on a voluntary basis with very little financial support or acknowledgment from government. Official Social Service agencies tend to see them a threat to their influence and funding and give minimal co-operation.

We have operated on a voluntary basis for 22 years and despite requests have never received a penny from Social Services.

We unlike Social Services operate on a 24/7 basis to help our clients and have seen many amazing miracles of deliverance.

This Bill is likely to increase demands on organisations like our own because it will cause problems resulting from alcoholism to worsen.

9. Registered Clubs

Do you have any additional comments on the provisions in the Bill which specifically relate to registered clubs [i.e. Clauses 22 to 32]?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

10. Additional Information

Are there any other measures not included in the Bill that you think should be included and why?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

- A Minimum Unit Pricing rate is urgently needed to help reduce the huge amount of excessive drinking in NI
- More assistance should be given to Organisations which are seeking to alleviate the problems associated with alcohol consumption.
- The Lobbying power of the alcohol industry with political leaders should be curtailed.

Do you have any other comments you would like to make?

Please provide your comments in the text box below:

NI political parties need to wake up to the serious problems that already exists because of alcoholism that are destroying every part of our society.