

Should cities and towns ban the small liquor bottles commonly referred to as ‘nips?’

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YES



DINA RUDICK/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Brian A. Kyes

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Chelsea Police Chief; President, Massachusetts Major City Police Chiefs Association

A “nip” of an alcoholic beverage is a miniature 50 ml bottle that contains one measured shot of hard liquor. They are relatively inexpensive, running from \$1 to \$2 depending on the selection. On cross-country flights they are also known as “airplane bottles” — passengers can enjoy a single serving of alcohol while relaxing in the comfort and safety of their assigned seat of an aircraft.

In 1982 George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson published an enlightening article in the “Atlantic Monthly” titled “Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety.” The underlying theme was that a single, unrepaired metaphoric “window” in a given neighborhood is a “signal” to others that no one cares. If it is left in a state of disrepair it only furthers the underlying

inference that it is open season to break even more windows without any fear of the consequences.

That same thinking prompted Chelsea to ban nips earlier this year, and should hopefully inspire similar bans in other communities. What signal does the sight of an intoxicated individual in public send to others who frequent that neighborhood or business district each day? How do others in the area feel when sidewalks, gutters, bus stops, parks, and playgrounds are cluttered with nip bottles scattered throughout? What about when intoxicated individuals urinate in public, pass out on city benches, or are attacked and robbed by certain predators due to their inebriated state of vulnerability? Are these all signals of a “broken window?” If so, don’t we have a responsibility to not only repair the broken windows we encounter but to also ascertain the underlying cause of how they became broken?

As police officers on the front lines of our respective communities we believe the sale of these single-serving nips are adversely affecting the quality of life for our residents. They are sold for one simple reason — convenience. They can be conveniently secreted in one’s pants or jacket pocket, conveniently consumed in a moment’s notice, and conveniently discarded in the street when finished. There is no place for these containers on our city streets. However, they should be allowed to be sold in certain locations — airplanes.

NO



Ben Weiner

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Owner of Sav-Mor Spirits in Somerville; President, Massachusetts Package Stores Association

Earlier this year, Chelsea banned the sale of 50 ml bottles of liquor — so-called “nips” — later extending it to 100 ml bottles. As someone whose family has owned independent retail package stores in Somerville, Cambridge, and Malden for three generations, I believe this decision sets a bad precedent for other communities and retail stores like my own. If adopted by other municipalities across the state, it could harm small businesses that employ nearly 20,000 residents and generate \$3 billion in annual revenues, according to data from a report prepared for the package store industry.

Many customers enjoy purchasing smaller-portion sizes of alcohol. Rather than promote a policy that urges people to consume more, cities like Chelsea should work to meet their objectives while ensuring local retailers can continue to be responsible employers and a positive presence in the community. When it comes to protecting the environment and public health, independent retailers stand ready to work with our cities and towns.

Like any local merchant, I keep our parking lots and sidewalks clean. If there is a litter problem, we should work as a community to clean it up. We should not ban the legal sale of products that represent 10 percent of the sales of independent stores at a time revenues are being impacted by rising costs, out-of-state shippers, and a growing cannabis industry. For an industry that pays workers an average of \$42,000, a 10 percent loss is overwhelming.

Of course, stores have a responsibility to enforce laws regarding the sale of alcohol to minors, and to spot problem drinkers. That’s why we train our staff to become familiar with customers – to know them, talk with them, and monitor their purchases. We also train employees to spot problems and deny sales to customers who appear intoxicated. We additionally prevent second party sales, and sales to minors.

Banning the sale of smaller portions of alcohol is bad policy. There are alternative means less harmful to businesses that achieve the same results. Instead of bans, municipalities should forge partnerships with local businesses that meet the needs of the communities without infringing on commerce.

This is not a scientific poll. Please vote only once.

Should cities and towns ban the small liquor bottles commonly referred to as ‘nips?’

Yes No

Vote

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As told to Globe correspondent John Laidler. To suggest a topic, please contact laidler@globe.com.