

Liquor Board mulls higher fines for sales to minors

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With very little licensee business to conduct, the Calvert County Liquor Board used a portion of their Thursday, Aug. 22 meeting to discuss possible changes in its rules and regulations.

Any potential changes would be part of the board's wish list for the 2014 session of the Maryland General Assembly.

Board chair Beth Swoap opined that liquor sales to minors is an ongoing problem in Calvert and a stiffer fine is needed. Swoap said she would prefer to see the panel given the authority to levy "a specific fine" for underage alcohol sales—a \$10,000 maximum. "We should have the authority to impose it," she said.

The board's acting attorney, Eugene Pitrof, noted that many legislators are wary about overburdening small businesses with fines.

The Calvert County Liquor Board is given authority under the Annotated Code of Maryland to draft its rules and regulations. However, the current regulations do not specifically indicate a maximum fine for violations but notes the violations are subject to the enabling provisions of the Annotated Code's liquor laws.

Swoap noted that sales to minors' violations routinely draw a fine of \$200. "It needs to be higher, it gives us a big stick," she said. Swoap added that a hefty fine would be preferable to a license suspension since the latter action often has an adverse effect on the cited business' employees.

"If we do this we need to take it to the public," said board member Malcolm Funn. "It [fine] is to protect minors."

The liquor board would likely need support for establishing such a high fine from the Calvert County Commissioners.

The liquor board members also indicated a desire to change at least a portion of their rules and regulations pertaining to license renewal applications. The board would hold a public hearing before making any changes.

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