



RHODE ISLAND LIQUOR OPERATORS COLLABORATIVE

REPRESENTING RHODE ISLAND'S INDEPENDENT LIQUOR RETAILERS

H8231 - OPPOSE

24 March 2026

Dear Chairman Casey and Committee Members:

The Rhode Island Liquor Operators Collaborative opposes House Bill 8231.

H8231 authorizes the Town of Scituate to issue three Class A liquor licenses irrespective of the long-standing population-based formula that governs license availability in Rhode Island. That formula is not arbitrary—it is a carefully constructed public safety mechanism designed to control access to alcohol and ensure responsible retail distribution.

Rhode Island's license-per-population ratio exists for a reason. It limits the density of alcohol outlets in any given community, reducing excessive availability that can lead to increased underage access, impaired driving, and alcohol-related harm. By tying licenses to population, the state ensures that alcohol is sold in a controlled, deliberate manner—not in a free-for-all environment driven by short-term economic interests.

By carving out an exception for one municipality, it opens the door for similar exceptions across the state. If every town begins seeking special legislation to exceed population limits, the entire regulatory structure collapses. What was once a balanced system becomes fragmented and inconsistent—weakening enforcement and increasing risk to public safety.

Liquor stores operate within a tightly regulated environment, often investing significant capital based on the scarcity and value of licenses. When new licenses are introduced outside of the established ratio, it dilutes that value overnight. Existing businesses—many of them family-owned—are forced to compete in a suddenly oversaturated market, not because of organic population growth, but because of legislative intervention.

This is not how a responsible system should function. The three-tier system depends on stability, predictability, and fairness. When policymakers begin selectively overriding population controls, they erode confidence in that system and create uncertainty for retailers, wholesalers, and municipalities alike.

Perhaps most importantly, we cannot lose sight of the broader public safety implications. Alcohol is not an ordinary commodity. It requires thoughtful regulation, measured access, and accountability at every level of distribution. Population-based licensing is one of the most effective tools we have to strike that balance.

H8231 may appear modest in scope, but its implications are far-reaching. It chips away at a proven system that has protected Rhode Island communities for decades. Once that foundation is weakened, it becomes increasingly difficult to restore.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nicholas A. Fede, Jr.".

Nicholas A. Fede, Jr.

Executive Director

Rhode Island Liquor Operators Collaborative