Labour Disputes Underscore Urgent Need to Modernize Provincial Liquor Laws, Says BIABC

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 10, 2025

VANCOUVER, BC - The Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (BIABC) is joining restaurant owners, private alcohol retailers and the BC Restaurant and Foodservices Association (BCRFA) in urging the provincial government to modernize BC's outdated liquor laws. The call comes as the ongoing BCGEU strike continues to severely disrupt the flow of alcohol to restaurants and bars across the province.

"Of the more than 15,000 restaurants operating in BC, over 90% are considered small businesses employing fewer than 50 people," said BIABC President Jeremy Heighton "Many are independent, family-run operations that are especially vulnerable to supply disruptions."

For weeks, members of the British Columbia General Employees Union (BCGEU) have been picketing BCLDB distribution centres and liquor stores, drying up supply lines to hospitality operators. This is the latest issue, making it difficult for many restaurants - most of them small, local businesses – to keep their doors open.

The provincial government has the ability to change the policy to support businesses and should be taking action to continually modernize the liquor policy, says BIABC. In fact, a Business Technical Advisory Panel on Liquor Policy recommended in 2018 that the government should allow restaurants to buy directly from private stores.

Under current rules, restaurants and pubs are prohibited from purchasing alcohol directly from private liquor stores. They must buy everything they resell to customers through the BC Liquor Distribution Branch (BCLDB) - a rigid structure that has long frustrated the hospitality sector and is now exacerbating the impacts of labour action.

Some businesses are now facing pressures on multiple fronts, with BCGEU picket lines disrupting deliveries, Canada Post strikes affecting online orders, and government restrictions that prevent alternative supply options.

"Local restaurants are part of the economic and cultural fabric of our communities," added Heighton. "They're already grappling with rising costs, labour shortages, and competitive pressures. Liquor law modernization is a practical, long-overdue step that

would give them more tools to stay resilient — especially during crises like the current strike."

BIABC is urging the provincial government to work with industry stakeholders to establish a hybrid model that maintains oversight while giving restaurants a viable alternative supply channel during disruptions.

About BIABC
The Business Improvement Areas of BC (BIABC) is the provincial champion of strong, vibrant, and successful downtowns, main streets, and commercial districts throughout the province. Its members represent more than 80 business districts, employing hundreds of thousands of retail, service, and office workers.

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