



Coleraine House  
Coleraine Street  
Dublin  
D07 E8XF  
Tel +353 (086) 2600903  
[admin@alcoholactionireland.ie](mailto:admin@alcoholactionireland.ie)

To the Members of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania

14 December 2021

This is a letter of concern about the proposed changes to the Alcohol Control Law to which we have been alerted by the Lithuanian Tobacco and Alcohol Control Coalition.

Internationally, and especially in Europe, the Lithuanian Alcohol Control Law serves as a model of effective legislation implementing the policies recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the WHO Best Buys: alcohol taxes, reduced availability, and restricted marketing. These measures have lately achieved an unprecedented drop in consumption in a very short time from 14 litres per capita in 2015 to 11.1 litres in 2019. It also had a significant decrease in alcohol related mortality and harm as well as increases in life expectancy (especially in men), which is noticed by national and international, World health organization.

Lithuania is among the top five countries which reduced alcohol consumption in the past five years the most. Current legislation is comprehensive and the special aspects of it – such as 20-year age limit for legal consumption, strict advertising ban and other measures ensure that the results will be sustained and allows to build healthier future for Lithuanian population. It is also important to highlight that policies targeting the youth (e.g., age limit of 20 and marketing restrictions) are especially important as a long-lasting investment into the improvement of public health in the society.

In Ireland we have also been developing legislation based on the WHO Best Buys. The Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 includes several elements around controls on sports marketing to children and limits on the extent of alcohol advertising on a sports area. Other controls include a prohibition on outdoor advertising within 200m of schools and on public transport. We are still waiting for the implementation of Sections of the Act which provide for statutory restrictions on the content of

**Alcohol Action Ireland Directors** Prof Frank Murray. (Chair) Consultant in Hepatology & Gastroenterology. M.B., B.Ch. B.A.O., M.D., F.R.C.P.I., F.R.C.P. (Ed), Prof Joe Barry MSc, MD, FRCPI, FFPHM, Public Health Specialist, Catherine Brogan, Mental Health Ireland, Pat Cahill, former President ASTI, James Doorley, Deputy Director, National Youth Council of Ireland, Michael Foy, Head of Finance, Commission for Communications Regulation, , Dr Mary O'Mahony, Specialist in Public Health Medicine and Medical Officer of Health, HSE South, Dr Colin O'Driscoll – Clinical Lead, HSE Mid-West Addiction Services, Dr Bobby Smyth, Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist Tadhg Young, Financial Services Executive.

**Patron** Prof. Geoffrey Shannon

alcohol advertising and for a broadcast threshold on alcohol advertisements on TV and radio. In relation to online advertising of alcohol, in Ireland a ban on advertising to children has been recommended by a parliamentary committee which is providing pre legislative scrutiny of an Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill.

However, it is clear that an outright ban on alcohol advertisements in all media – traditional and online would be by far the most straightforward and effective form of control in this area and Lithuania has been leading the way in this regard.

Changing the Law and removing several of these key aspects will likely have considerable consequences on both consumption and public health. In a situation where the healthcare services already are strained it would be irresponsible to adopt measures that would worsen this situation.

With this in mind we hope that you will vote to maintain and strengthen current alcohol control policy in Lithuania. This is not a time to disregard best practices advocated by both science and the WHO and to implement measures that has a strong potential to both increase alcohol-related harm and overall societal costs. Instead, protect the functioning, evidence-based, alcohol policy that you currently have. It saves lives.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheila Gilheany". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Dr Sheila Gilheany

CEO Alcohol Action Ireland