**Virtual Press Briefing – August 26, 2020**

**COVID-19 Alcohol Deregulation is Not the New Normal**

**Gilbert Mora Statement**

Good Morning, my name is Gilbert Mora and I am the Co-Chair of the California Alcohol Policy Alliance.

In California, Governor Gavin Newsom **failed in his COVID-19 response** by **making alcohol sales essential.** Alcohol deregulation in California has taken the form of “regulatory relief” measures implemented by the state’s Alcoholic Beverage Control Department. These measures allow alcohol establishments to continue operation in the middle of the global pandemic.

Some of the so called “regulatory relief measures” include: To-go cocktails, at home alcohol delivery, expansion of alcohol establishment’s dining areas into sidewalks and streets, and the sale of unused alcohol licenses.

In California less than a month ago, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Department explicitly stated that, I quote, “public safety and economic development is our first priority”. However, is it not **also** their responsibility to **protect the public health especially in this time of COVID -19?**

Even after public health concerns were brought to the attention of the Alcoholic Beverage Control Department, they failed to take action. Even after the department admitted to more than a 50% violation rate of delivery services, no appropriate corrective actions were taken. We are not even sure if the California Alcoholic Beverage Control consulted the California Department of Public Health in a meaningful way when formulating these “regulatory relief measures.”

In California, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Department is primarily a law enforcement agency, but its regulatory actions and inactions would have you believe it is instead an alcohol promotion and economic development department. ABC rarely denies alcohol licenses and in fact has contributed to social, racial and health inequities by allowing alcohol overconcentration in historically disadvantaged communities. These inequities are currently contributing to the increase of covid-19 cases among people of color who are also essential worker.

This compounded with the lack of interest from the California Department of Public Health to address alcohol harms in the time of Covid-19 is particularly alarming. It is clear that there is no scientific basis behind the formulation of these so called “regulatory relief measures”. Governor Gavin Newson and the mentioned state departments only have one intention in mind, and that is to bail out the alcohol industry. How many more lives are they willing to sacrifice to satisfy their alcohol industry political donors? The Governor himself built his fortune selling alcohol.

The buck stops at Governor Gavin Newsom. The Alcoholic Beverage Department and the Public Health Department are under his jurisdiction. The California Alcohol Policy Alliance refuses to allow alcohol deregulation to be a new normal. We demand that the regulatory relief measures be taken back, we ask for a temporary closure of alcohol establishments that put lives at risk, and most importantly we ask for an alcohol COVID-19 response based on science not profits. Alcohol sales are not essential. Lives are essential.