



Dell Children's Medical Center
4900 Mueller Blvd
Austin, TX 78723

August 19, 2021

Dear Austin Parks and Recreation Board Members and Planning Commissioners,

On behalf of Dell Children's Drowning Prevention and Water Safety Program, we are writing in opposition to allowing alcohol sales at Barton Springs Pool in Austin, Texas. Mixing alcohol use and water activity has several potential risks that increase the likelihood a severe drowning event will occur, especially in deep, cold waters such as Barton Springs. Drowning is a terrible, but preventable tragedy that takes the lives of nearly 340 Texans per year.

In Central Texas, Dell Children's Medical Center treats approximately 40 pediatric patients each year for drowning-related incidents. As an emergency medicine physician, representing the only Level I pediatric trauma hospital in Austin, Texas, I strongly urge you to consider these risk factors. It is heartbreaking to tell parents their child has died or is suffering a massive neurological injury that will change their life and their child's life forever.

Children are particularly at risk as drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury death for children 1-4 years old and need to be closely and attentively supervised around all types of water.

¹ Several factors increase the risk of drowning including lack of supervision and alcohol use.

With the physiological and psychological impairments of alcohol, supervision behaviors may be affected, putting children at a higher risk for drowning.² Even with adequate lifeguard coverage at Barton Springs Pool, supervision is the primary responsibility of the caregiver. The risk increases for children if that caregiver is slightly impaired due to alcohol use. Additionally,

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, July 1). *WISQARS (web-based injury STATISTICS query and Reporting System)|Injury CENTER|CDC*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, June 17). *Drowning facts*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/facts/index.html>.

alcohol consumption around water also increases drowning risk for adults due to the impaired motor ability, coordination, and increased risk-taking behavior. In a study of drowning deaths among adolescents and adults, alcohol was detected in up to 70% of individuals associated with drowning during a water recreational activity.³

In conclusion, we strongly discourage selling and consuming alcohol while swimming and during other recreational water activities. Drowning is 100% preventable, and we encourage our community to engage in safe and healthy behaviors, especially around bodies of water. Anything and everything that can be done to prevent drowning and the attendant mortality and morbidity is needed at every level. Anyone can drown, but no one should.

Regards,

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³ Driscoll, T. R. (2004). Review of the role of alcohol in drowning associated with recreational aquatic activity. *Injury Prevention, 10*(2), 107–113.
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