

Legal Briefs

News You Can Use from the City of Oakland Office of the City Attorney

Legal Briefs is a series of essays by City Attorney John Russo to update the community on key projects, major initiatives and important legal developments in the Office of the City Attorney.

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OAKLAND MERCHANTS PLEDGE PARTNERSHIP OVER PROFIT

By

*Barbara B. Killey, Esq.
Neighborhood Law Corps*

*Mohamed S. Mohamed
President, Yemeni American
Grocers Association*

*Frank Rose, Chair
Beat 34 NCPC*

The State of California permits liquor outlets to sell alcohol until two o'clock in the morning, and most do. So what would you think if a liquor store near you voluntarily closed its doors at midnight?

On February 20, the Neighborhood Law Corps, the Yemeni American Grocers' Association, and community leaders organized an historic event in Oakland: 100 neighborhood grocers signed the Oakland Community Partners Pledge declaring that they will 1) close by midnight, 2) eliminate sales of fortified wines, 3) eliminate sales of narcotics paraphernalia, and 4) attend regular community meetings to work with their neighbors. Over 100 community members and leaders, and several city officials including Mayor Jerry Brown and City Attorney John Russo were present to accept the pledge.

The event originated from three sources: East Oakland residents frustrated by the constant crime and blight they saw around certain liquor stores; the leadership of the Yemeni American Grocers' Association, who wanted to find a way to work with the community; and Neighborhood Law Corps attorneys, who facilitated dialogue and collaboration between residents and merchants, which led to the creation of the Pledge.

We all believe that closing a liquor store between midnight and 2 a.m. and eliminating the sales of fortified wines and narcotics paraphernalia will result in significant reduction of crime and blight in its neighborhood.

Another element of this partnership is ongoing communication. The Yemeni American Grocers' Association members renewed their commitment to meet regularly with their community groups to work together on efforts to address problems and improve neighborhood conditions.

We strongly encourage more liquor outlets to sign the Pledge and work with their neighbors to make Oakland a better and safer home for all. If you are a merchant or know of one that wants to participate, please call the Office of the City Attorney at 510-238-3601. Stores that sign the Pledge receive a poster that says, "We signed the Pledge." If you see one of these in a neighborhood market, remember to congratulate the owners and support them with your patronage! For the list of participating merchants, explanation of fortified wines and narcotics paraphernalia, go to www.oaklandcityattorney.org, or call the office.

While this is only a small step, it is one that was initiated by the storeowners and residents of Oakland, without the need for an ordinance or the exercise of the City's enforcement powers. We hope that it is only the first of many such creative, cooperative, and voluntary steps that make our neighborhoods safer.