

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE AND CANNABIS BOARD
+ + + + +
MEETING

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IN THE MATTER OF: :

Letena Ethiopian :
Restaurant, LLC, :
t/a Letena :
3100 14th Street NW : Fact Finding
Retailer CR - ANC 1A : Hearing
License No. 104754 :
:

(Review Request for :
Class Change, Change of :
Hours, and Manufacturer :
On-Site Sales and :
Consumption) :
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Wednesday
August 12, 2026

The Alcoholic Beverage and Cannabis
Board met via WebEx videoconference, Chairperson
Donovan W. Anderson presiding.

PRESENT:

DONOVAN W. ANDERSON, Chairperson
SILAS GRANT, JR., Member
RYAN JONES, Member
DAVID MEADOWS, Member
TERI JANINE QUINN, Member
JAMES TURNER, Member

ALSO PRESENT:

JOSE ORELLANA, DC ABCA Staff
YAMROT EZINEH, Licensee

1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 11:04 a.m.

3 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right.

4 The next case in our calendar is a fact finding
5 hearing on Letena, L-E-T-E-N-A, license number
6 104754. Mr. Orellana, can you please elevate
7 the rights of the parties in this case?

8 MR. ORELLANA: Sure thing. Yamrot
9 Ezineh access elevated. That is our turn.

10 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Thank you.
11 Can you please come on camera, ma'am, if you're
12 able to. Ms. Ezineh, are you able to come on
13 camera, ma'am?

14 MR. ORELLANA: Sending the
15 individual request to unmute. There she is.

16 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: She's fine.
17 All right. Good morning, ma'am. Can you please
18 spell and state your name for the record?

19 MS. EZINEH: Yamrot Ezineh.

20 Y-A-M-R-O-T E-Z-I-N-E-H.

21 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: And what is
22 your relationship to this establishment, ma'am?

23 MS. EZINEH: The owner.

24 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right.
25 Good morning, ma'am. Now this is a fact finding

1 here, ma'am. I -- it's my understanding that
2 you are operating a -- you have a Class C
3 restaurant license with an approval of
4 distillery pub endorsement. You're trying -- if
5 I understand, you're trying to change your class
6 of license. So why don't you explain to the
7 board -- this is basically the agency is trying
8 to find out what it is that you're trying to do
9 and what -- and whether or not this is something
10 -- what are the pros and cons? So maybe you can
11 explain to the board currently what type of --
12 you have a -- what type of license do you have?
13 What do you currently do? And what is it that
14 you're trying to -- what change are you trying
15 to make, ma'am?

16 MS. EZINEH: Okay. We been
17 operating as a restaurant for the last nine plus
18 years. And recently, we basically installed a
19 mini distillery that is currently producing.
20 And we're from restaurant return to a distillery
21 pub. That came with licensing fee that is
22 equivalent to a manufacturing. But
23 unfortunately, we haven't been given the right
24 -- the full right of a manufacturer, which is
25 the ability to distribute within DC. So that is

1 basically limiting us in terms of the market we
2 can access. And we basically were hoping at
3 least we'll have the access of other Ethiopian
4 restaurants to sell our liquor. So our hope now
5 is to get that privilege as well with the actual
6 fee.

7 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: But you are a
8 restaurant and so therefore based on the
9 endorsement that you have, you are able to serve
10 -- to sell your own product, but you cannot sell
11 it to your customers -- but you cannot sell it
12 to the general public. So you're --

13 MS. EZINEH: We can -- I'm sorry.

14 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: I'm sorry, go
15 ahead, ma'am.

16 MS. EZINEH: We can sell it at the
17 restaurant but not outside of the restaurant --

18 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Right.

19 MS. EZINEH: -- as such.

20 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Right.

21 MS. EZINEH: Yeah.

22 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Now, so your
23 intent is that you want to sell -- what -- so
24 what is it that you're producing?

25 MS. EZINEH: It's an Ethiopian

1 specialty -- it's an Ethiopian specialty spirit.

2 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right.

3 And so your intent is that you want to sell that
4 to the general public. So you want to make it
5 available to anyone who buys it, other
6 restaurants, other bars. Is that what you want
7 to do? Is that correct?

8 MS. EZINEH: That's correct. Yes,
9 that's correct.

10 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: So in order
11 for you to do that, you know that you'd have to
12 -- if you -- in order for -- you probably, you'd
13 have to give up your restaurant license.

14 MS. EZINEH: That was what I was
15 told. I mean, I would be able to change the C
16 to manufacturing license.

17 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: No, you --

18 MS. EZINEH: But that would still --
19 that -- I mean, the explanation may not be
20 right, but we've been going through quite a few
21 back and forth, but no, this being quite new to
22 ABCA, they haven't been able to give me the
23 exact procedure or the exact change that I need
24 to make.

25 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right.

1 So you couldn't -- now, you couldn't operate as
2 a restaurant. So you'd have to give up your
3 restaurant license. So you couldn't operate as
4 a restaurant anymore. And --

5 MS. EZINEH: So, okay. So that
6 would mean that I wouldn't even be able to sell
7 food? Is that what it means? Because my
8 understanding was that -- yeah. I could -- I
9 would be able to sell food anyways, so -- and
10 the drinks. So I thought it would just be
11 similar to what I could be able to do.

12 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: No, because
13 if you have a manufacturer of a license, you
14 could only sell your spirits. So you can sell
15 any other spirits. So yeah, you could have a
16 restaurant, but you could not sell any other
17 spirits with the exception of what it is that
18 you produce.

19 MS. EZINEH: That makes sense. Yes.
20 That's how it was explained to me. Yeah. I
21 will be able to sell the food and our --
22 whatever we produce on site in terms of spirit.
23 And we will need to give up the wine and beer,
24 if that -- if that's what I was --

25 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Because you

1 --

2 MS. EZINEH: If that's correct.

3 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: But I'm
4 saying the only spirit you could -- the only
5 spirit that you could serve on the premises is
6 the spirit that you produce.

7 MS. EZINEH: That's fine. Yes. I
8 understand that.

9 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: And so I
10 guess do you understand that by changing your
11 license to a manufacturer class S -- class A,
12 your CR privileges are permanently relinquished?
13 So you can no longer operate as a restaurant?

14 MS. EZINEH: In terms of spirit and
15 drinks. Is that what you mean?

16 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Currently, as
17 a restaurant what do you serve as far as beer,
18 wine, and spirits?

19 MS. EZINEH: We sell all. Beer,
20 wine and spirits.

21 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: From -- you
22 sell all type of beer, all type of wines and all
23 types of spirits.

24 MS. EZINEH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

25 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: And so you

1 are aware that you could no longer do that?

2 MS. EZINEH: Yes. I'm not given any
3 other options, so yeah.

4 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Well, ma'am,
5 you're the one who -- you're, you're the one --

6 MS. EZINEH: Yeah. It's just, I
7 mean -- we -- we're giving up a significant
8 amount of sales from beer and wine, no question
9 about it. But in the meantime food traffic is
10 very low, so we want to be able to access market
11 outside of our four -- you know, four walls. So
12 it's just better of two difficult decisions to
13 make.

14 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: In fact, you
15 will have to reapply for a completely new retail
16 license from scratch, subject to public notice,
17 anti-protests and potential moratorium?

18 MS. EZINEH: That's if I want to go
19 back to the C, is that what you mean or?

20 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: I'm trying to
21 -- what I'm trying to find out is if you're ever
22 manufacturer. I'm trying to see if you apply
23 for a manufacturer license if you -- let me see.
24 Right. Because you're applying for -- so you
25 are applying for a completely new license. So

1 you're applying now for a manufacturer license
2 which is subject to public notice, the protest
3 period. And where is this that you're located?

4 MS. EZINEH: In Columbia Heights,
5 14th Street.

6 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Where is
7 this? Is this close to the -- I'm trying to
8 figure it out. If you're close to the street
9 where the moratorium is.

10 MS. EZINEH: No. It's way further
11 up. We are on Park and 14th Street.

12 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Okay. Okay.
13 So you're all the way up. I'm not aware if
14 there -- if -- I don't believe that there's an
15 -- I am -- off the top of my head, I'm not
16 certain if there's any moratorium in that -- of
17 -- there's no -- I'm not aware of whether
18 there's an moratorium in that area. And now
19 another comment. If the class changes approve,
20 are you aware that you will no longer be able to
21 sell and serve wine and beer to patrons?

22 MS. EZINEH: That's correct. Yeah.

23 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Are you also
24 aware that the spirits that will be offered for
25 sale at the establishment would be limited to

1 spirit distilled at your licensed location?

2 MS. EZINEH: Yes.

3 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Are you
4 currently utilizing your distillery hub to
5 manufacture spirits at this location?

6 MS. EZINEH: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: So what
8 spirits are you currently manufacturing at this
9 location?

10 MS. EZINEH: It's specialty Tarik
11 Areke. It's an Ethiopian specialty drink.

12 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Can you spell
13 that for the record? We have a court reporter,
14 please. Just spell that for what it -- what the
15 drink is, please.

16 MS. EZINEH: Okay. Tarik,
17 T-A-R-I-K, Areke, A-R-E-K-E.

18 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: And what --
19 again, what is that, ma'am?

20 MS. EZINEH: It's -- the category is
21 not -- is in under specialty, but it's an
22 Ethiopian specifically specialty drink.

23 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Okay, that's
24 fine. So what is your plan for the physical
25 footprint of your current dining room and

1 kitchen?

2 MS. EZINEH: We -- currently we have
3 about 2,500 square feet area, so it's -- we're
4 going to remain as we are. We're not going to
5 change the actual layout.

6 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: But how do
7 you intend to make room for your manufacturing
8 equipment? Because you'll be --

9 MS. EZINEH: Oh, it's already there
10 and --

11 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Go ahead.

12 MS. EZINEH: We had a back space
13 which didn't even interfere with the dining
14 area. So we're going to remain as we are. So
15 the actual equipment is in the back.

16 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: But -- so
17 you're saying that you plan to -- you still want
18 to sell food at your current location; is that
19 correct?

20 MS. EZINEH: That's correct, yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: But how do
22 you expect to match revenue compared to your
23 restaurant sales, especially if you do not -- if
24 -- especially if you do not have a diverse
25 collection of alcoholic beverages?

1 MS. EZINEH: I mean, our alcoholic
2 sales was about 3 percent anyways. So it was
3 never -- it was never higher than that. But
4 with the new revenue that is -- with the new
5 revenue that we hope will come from Tarik Areke,
6 we'll be able to compensate for that.
7 Compensate and more.

8 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: I mean, this
9 is your vision, this is what it is that you
10 want, but are you saying that the specialty
11 Ethiopian spirits that you wish to produce,
12 you're saying you believe that it is that
13 popular that your revenue would be significantly
14 increased?

15 MS. EZINEH: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: So are you
17 planning to sell spirits directly to other
18 licensed alcohol retailers?

19 MS. EZINEH: Yeah, that's the plan
20 because we already have restaurants and ABC's --
21 I mean, alcohol liquor stores that are
22 interested in buying. And then we realize
23 there's a huge demand for it. So --

24 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right.
25 Let's see how -- I'm trying to see if any other

1 questions. Any questions? I know this is
2 something new for the agency and for the board,
3 so while I'm looking to see if I have any
4 questions, any questions that the board members
5 wish to ask, you're welcome to go ahead and ask.

6 MEMBER TURNER: Mr. Chair?

7 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Yes, Mr.
8 Turner.

9 MEMBER TURNER: On your -- at your
10 location, I'm quite familiar with it. It's in
11 part of DC USA, I believe, on the northern end.
12 And it's a rather large restaurant space for the
13 area.

14 MS. EZINEH: Right.

15 MEMBER TURNER: Is the manufacturing
16 or the -- manufacturing and producing of the --
17 I forget the name. I think it's called
18 Ethiopian tequila.

19 MS. EZINEH: Yes. Yeah. You can
20 call it that. Yeah.

21 MEMBER TURNER: It's in a separate
22 part, not directly connected to the restaurant,
23 or is it directly connected?

24 MS. EZINEH: It's actually directly
25 connected. The restaurant space is about 2,500

1 and 500 of it in the back is what we're using
2 for manufacturing. Yes.

3 MEMBER TURNER: I believe some of
4 your -- some of the issues here are related to
5 having the spaces combined of manufacturing,
6 distributing and having a restaurant. So that's
7 causing you to have to choose one or the other
8 in these -- instead of perhaps maybe creating or
9 separating the businesses and having a
10 manufacturing and having a restaurant.

11 MS. EZINEH: Right.

12 MEMBER TURNER: So there are things
13 here that might be alternatives for you to think
14 of, because I believe the board wants to help
15 businesses survive and thrive. So that's some
16 of the difficulty we're having here of this
17 combined effort. And if you can give us a
18 better understanding of, do you really just want
19 to be a manufacturer of this spirit and that be
20 the only thing you can sell of a alcohol nature
21 in your restaurant?

22 MS. EZINEH: I mean, I'll tell you
23 why we wanted to go for this alternative. Like,
24 I said the proportion of our revenue doesn't
25 come from spirit sales mainly. It is from beer

1 wine and recently from Tarik Areke. And over
2 the last year, I mean, business been really slow
3 and the food traffic to our restaurant hasn't
4 been that great. So this alternative for us is
5 -- it gives us an option to actually access
6 other restaurants within the area -- within the
7 district that has higher traffic, and who has
8 more interest in the liquor or in the spirit.
9 If we just adhere to what we're doing now and to
10 -- and keep selling other spirits and wine, I
11 don't believe we can stay in business. That's
12 the problem now. So we're trying to see if this
13 could improve our monthly income, really.

14 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Any other
15 questions, Mr. Turner? Are you -- do you have
16 any other questions, Mr. Turner?

17 MEMBER TURNER: No, sir. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Any other
19 questions by any of the board members? Go
20 ahead, Mr. Meadows.

21 MEMBER MEADOWS: Yes, hi. Good
22 morning. So your Tarik Areke, you have that
23 copyrighted? Do you have a name of, you know,
24 like a Smirnoff or a Bacardi? Do you have a
25 name that you're titling it?

1 MS. EZINEH: Unfortunately, we --
2 it's a new category. So that's one thing I'm
3 working with TTB to bring it as a new category.
4 But otherwise, it just falls under specialty
5 drinks.

6 MEMBER MEADOWS: And so right now
7 you don't have a copyright --

8 MS. EZINEH: Well, I have trademark.

9 MEMBER MEADOWS: You have a
10 trademark. And that's for Letena restaurant or
11 for the --

12 MS. EZINEH: For the -- for Tarek
13 Areke.

14 MEMBER MEADOWS: Okay. And you're
15 also requesting a change of hours. Could you
16 explain what that request is?

17 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Now, hold on.
18 There's no change of hours. I mean, I -- well,
19 I -- what they're asking for right now, they
20 want to change their license class. And so I
21 think part of the --

22 MEMBER MEADOWS: Actually, I'm
23 reading right here. It says request for a class
24 change, change of hours, and onsite sales. But
25 that's what I'm reading.

1 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: I'm sorry.
2 Go ahead.

3 MS. EZINEH: I mean, the only reason
4 I requested for change of hours is not because I
5 wanted to, but I was told that that is a
6 requirement. For us to get a manufacturing
7 license, we have to change the hours. That was
8 the only reason. Otherwise, I don't mind
9 keeping the current hours.

10 MEMBER MEADOWS: Okay.

11 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: So what are
12 the current hours? I apologize, Mr. Matthews.
13 Meadows, I apologize. Yeah, so what are your
14 hours? What are you asking for? Yeah.

15 MS. EZINEH: The current hours are
16 from morning 10:00 a.m. to -- on Monday to
17 Friday I think is about 12:00. And then Friday
18 and Saturday are until 2:00 a.m. And I was told
19 that there's a limitation in terms of hours that
20 we can operate as a manufacturer. So I
21 shortened those hours.

22 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Which are
23 shorter hours, Mr. Meadows.

24 MS. EZINEH: Yes.

25 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: It would be

1 shorter hours, if not longer hours. Okay. I
2 apologize. Yeah. Go ahead, Mr. Meadows.

3 MEMBER MEADOWS: That's it. Thank
4 you very much. All the best.

5 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Okay.

6 MS. EZINEH: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Any other
8 questions from any other board members?
9 Anything else? Anything else you want to say,
10 ma'am?

11 MS. EZINEH: I mean, all I want to
12 say is the ideal position was to actually
13 operate as we are now. Because every revenue
14 that we get helps. But if that was not a
15 possibility, it's definitely this option is what
16 we like to go for.

17 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: As I -- the
18 purpose is to make it clear to you that you're
19 asking for a manufacturer's license, so you'll
20 have -- you're going to go through the protest
21 period. So you have to apply for a new license.
22 You have to go --

23 MS. EZINEH: So would that mean --

24 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Go ahead.

25 MS. EZINEH: So would that mean,

1 like, in -- while we're -- while I'm waiting for
2 the manufacturing license, I would be without
3 license or would I use the current license?

4 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Well, I
5 think, I think we can discuss this internally
6 with the agency. I guess my assumption is that
7 you can continue operating as a restaurant until
8 that license is granted, because of course you
9 have to go through the protest period. It has
10 to be -- there's a 45-day protest period to see
11 if it's going to -- well, you have to submit an
12 application. Then it has to be placard. We
13 have to wait for the protest period. So I don't
14 see any reason why the agency would not allow
15 you to operate as a restaurant. However -- hold
16 on a minute. Hold on. Oh, I apologize. They
17 don't need a protest period. I need to get more
18 info. All right. Let me see. All right.
19 They're probably not a protest period, but I --
20 this is something can be discussed with the
21 agency in a sense that until that license is
22 approved, then you can continue operating as a
23 restaurant. However, you cannot sell the
24 product -- because you cannot sell the product
25 until you get the new license. You cannot sell

1 the product to any other establishment. You can
2 only sell it to your customers. So not -- so
3 it's -- yeah, so you can continue operating
4 under your current license -- under a current
5 restaurant license to do what you're currently
6 doing until it's approved.

7 MS. EZINEH: Right.

8 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: So I wanted,
9 but I -- so I want to declare though that you
10 cannot sell it to non-restaurant customers.

11 MS. EZINEH: Mm-hmm.

12 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right.
13 So until the license is issued, you cannot sell
14 it to a liquor store. You cannot sell it to
15 anyone unless it's the current -- your current
16 restaurant license. You can continue operating
17 on the restaurant. You can continue operating,
18 selling beer and wine as you have. But as soon
19 as we issue the license, then you would have to
20 stop.

21 MS. EZINEH: Sure. Okay. Sounds
22 good. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: But I want
24 you though, ma'am, to be clear that if this
25 license is issued, you can no longer sell beer,

1 wine, or any other spirits without -- you can no
2 longer sell beer or wine or any other spirits
3 except for the one that you manufacture
4 in-house. Is that clear to you, ma'am?

5 MS. EZINEH: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: So -- but let
7 me ask you a question. How -- what's the
8 alcohol by volume in the spirit that you want to
9 mass produce?

10 MS. EZINEH: Forty percent.

11 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Forty
12 percent. And so how much do you -- I mean, how
13 much spirits do you believe that you would be
14 able to manufacture? I don't know. Tell me
15 about what is your -- what's your business plan
16 in the sense of how much do you plan to
17 manufacture?

18 MS. EZINEH: Capacity? Current
19 capacity is about 10,000 a year.

20 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Is that a
21 whole lot? I don't know. I'm asking what is
22 that?

23 MS. EZINEH: It is. I mean, in
24 terms of business, yes. It is.

25 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right.

1 Let me see. Okay. All right. And so the new
2 hours is that as a manufacturer, you'd have to
3 stop at -- the hours of operation for a
4 manufacturer is that you'd have to close at
5 midnight. That's the latest that you can --

6 MS. EZINEH: Yeah.

7 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: -- you'd be
8 open.

9 MS. EZINEH: Right. Yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Do you have
11 any other question, ma'am, that you want to ask
12 us?

13 MS. EZINEH: No.

14 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: The -- well,
15 all right, we will think about it some more.
16 We'll provide some guidance to the agency.

17 MS. EZINEH: Okay.

18 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: And you will
19 be contacted by the agency next steps. But I
20 just want to be -- just want to inform you that
21 you can continue operating as a restaurant
22 through this process. I just want, however, to
23 remind you that you cannot sell the product to
24 anyone who's not a customer of the restaurant
25 until the new license is issued to you.

1 MS. EZINEH: Okay. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right.

3 And if that's -- as I said, we'll take this
4 matter on advisement and we'll issue some
5 guidance shortly on next steps. Thank you,
6 ma'am. Have a great day.

7 MS. EZINEH: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right.

9 MS. EZINEH: You too. Bye-bye.

10 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right.

11 That is our -- we're at the end of our calendar
12 for the --

13 (Whereupon, the above-entitled
14 matter went off the record at 11:29 a.m.)

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1 C E R T I F I C A T E

2 This is to certify that the foregoing transcript
3 was duly recorded and accurately transcribed
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9 and further that I am not a relative nor an
10 employee of any of the parties nor counsel
11 employed by the parties, and I am not
12 financially or otherwise interested in the
13 outcome of the action.

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19 _____

20 Lauryn Barnes
21
22
23
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