

Regulatory Path for a Huntsville, AL Poolroom Serving Alcohol

Licenses and Permits (City, County, State)

Alabama ABC Liquor License (State): You must obtain a liquor license from the Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) Board. For a pool hall that serves alcohol, the likely license is a **Lounge Retail Liquor Class I** (on-premises consumption) ¹. The state license fee is \$300 per year ¹. The ABC process entails:

- **Pre-Application & Documentation:** Complete a pre-application (ABC Form LCD-2) and gather all required documents (e.g. citizenship proof, background check, lease, corporate papers) ² ³. You will need to schedule an appointment with your ABC Division Office to review the application and checklist ⁴. A non-refundable state filing fee (around \$100) is usually required with the ABC application ⁵. All owners/officers will be fingerprinted and undergo background checks (in Huntsville the city charges \$25 per person for background checks) ⁶. Notably, anyone with a felony conviction cannot be issued a billiard room license ⁷.
- **Local Approval:** Alabama law requires local approval for liquor licenses. In Huntsville, you must **first** file with the ABC Board, then submit a **City of Huntsville Alcohol Beverage License Application** ⁸. The city's License Review Committee and City Council will review the application. The city will **not** issue its local license until the county probate judge and ABC Board have approved your state license ⁹ ¹⁰. Expect to provide the city with articles of incorporation/organization, a copy of your deed or lease (in the business's name) ², and possibly a **Health Department letter** (even if you don't serve food, the Madison County Health Dept. must provide a letter of intent or permit indicating your status) ¹¹. Huntsville charges a \$100 local application fee and will not forward your request to Council until all paperwork is in order ⁵ ³.
- **License Review & Hearings:** Huntsville will notify property owners within 500 feet of your location about your alcohol license request ¹². A public hearing may be held where nearby residents can voice concerns (common issues are proximity to homes, churches, traffic, noise) ¹³ ¹⁴. The City Council ultimately votes to approve or deny your liquor license. (Huntsville, as a Class 3 municipality, has broad discretion and can deny a license if evidence suggests a "negative impact" on the surrounding area ¹⁵.) It's critical to choose a location with proper zoning and minimal neighborhood opposition to avoid denial.
- **Alcohol License Issuance:** After city approval, you'll receive a **Letter of Approval** to take back to the ABC Board ³. The ABC will then issue the state license. **Typical Timeline:** ~45–60 days total ³. (Expect ~5–6 weeks from application to final issuance in Huntsville, given the background checks and council schedule ³.) **Initial Costs:** \$300 state license fee + \$100 state app fee + \$100 city filing fee + \$25 per background check + cost of required bonds (see below) + any publication/advertising fees (if required). **Renewal:** Alabama liquor licenses are renewed **annually** (generally by September

30th for the Oct. 1 start of the license year ¹⁶). The \$300 state fee recurs; Huntsville also charges annual local license taxes based on your alcohol sales (see City liquor privilege license below). Renewals require maintaining compliance (e.g. active business privilege licenses, liquor tax bond, etc.).

City of Huntsville Business/Privilege License: Every business in Huntsville needs a city **business license**. This is a general revenue license (tax) based on your business type and gross receipts. For a bar/pool hall, Huntsville imposes a **Liquor Privilege License Tax** on alcohol sales (a percentage of gross receipts from alcohol) ¹⁷ and a general license on other revenues (cover charges, table fees, etc.). You apply through the City Finance Office after zoning approval. **Cost:** The liquor license tax is calculated on gross sales of alcohol (e.g. 10% of liquor sales, per Huntsville Code Chapter 15, Article IV) and paid annually or quarterly ¹⁷ . Additionally, the city business license for non-liquor revenue will have a schedule (often \$150+ for the first \$50,000 of revenue, etc.). **Timeline:** The city license is usually issued immediately once you have your state ABC license approval, zoning compliance, and have paid the fee. It must be renewed every **January** (Huntsville business licenses run on a calendar year). *Note:* You cannot get the city business license until the county probate judge and ABC have granted the alcohol license ¹⁰ , due to state law.

Madison County (State) Business Licenses: Alabama requires a set of **state/county privilege licenses** obtained via the County Probate Judge or License Commissioner for specific business activities. For a poolroom bar in Madison County, multiple licenses under Title 40, Chapter 12, Code of Alabama will apply (these are annual taxes, separate from the ABC license):

- **Pool Hall License & Bond:** License code §40-12-146 requires a license *per pool table* for public use. The fee is **\$38.50 per table per year** (state + county combined) for standard billiard tables ¹⁸ ¹⁹ . Before the county will issue this, you **must file a \$1,000 Pool Room Operator's Bond** with the probate judge ²⁰ . The bond (a surety bond costing about \$100/year) ensures you comply with poolroom laws (no gambling, no minors loitering, etc.) ²¹ ²² . The bond and pool hall license **run October 1 to Sept 30** yearly ²³ . *Prerequisites:* The **applicant must be at least 19 years old, a U.S. citizen, with no felony convictions** ⁷ . An affidavit attesting to good moral character and that you will forbid gambling, drunkenness, etc., is required with the application ²⁴ . The license is issued in the owner's name and they must have "sole personal charge" of the business ²⁵ (meaning you are expected to be responsible for day-to-day management).
- **County Alcohol Retail Licenses:** In addition to the ABC license, Alabama's privilege license law requires county licenses for selling beer and wine. You will need a *retail beer license* (on-premises) and a *retail table wine license* from the county (each typically \$75 state + \$37.50 county = \$112.50 total annually, plus \$1 issuance fee, depending on population) ²⁶ . These are often obtained after the ABC license is approved (the probate office will see your ABC license). If you plan to sell *package* beer/wine to-go, additional off-premises licenses would be needed (usually not the case for a pool hall bar).
- **County Tobacco License (if applicable):** If you will sell cigarettes, vaping, or tobacco products, a county tobacco retailer license (§40-12-72) is required (cost ~\$25) ²⁷ .
- **Soft Drink License:** Alabama even licenses soft drink sales. If you serve **fountain drinks or sodas**, you need a soft drink license (§40-12-69): approximately \$38.50/year for fountain service ²⁸ ²⁹ .

(and \ \$4.75 if selling bottled/canned sodas) ³⁰ . This applies because bars sell non-alcoholic beverages as mixers or to designated drivers.

- **General Store License:** Almost all businesses also need the general “Store License” (§40-12-315) for operating a place of business. The fee depends on city population and number of locations. In a city the size of Huntsville, this is about \ \$25 (if only one location) to \ \$38 annually ³¹ ³² (varies by seating capacity or inventory; often included in other licenses).

Zoning and Occupancy Permits: Before licensing, ensure your chosen location is zoned for a “pool hall/bar” use. Huntsville’s zoning code treats bars/nightclubs as specific use categories (often requiring commercial zoning *and* a special exception for late-night alcohol service). Verify the property’s zoning allows an “Assembly” or “Recreational Indoor Entertainment” use with alcohol. If any special exception or conditional use permit is required (for example, to operate past midnight – see Operating Hours section), you must get approval from the Board of Zoning Adjustment **before** opening ³³ . After any build-out, you’ll need a **Certificate of Occupancy (CO)** from the city Inspections Department. The CO is issued after building inspections for **building code** compliance – including electrical, plumbing, HVAC, and **fire safety**. The Fire Marshal will set an **occupant load limit** for the space, which must be posted. Exceeding this capacity is a serious violation. *Tip:* Engage city planning/zoning early – you may need a parking plan and to meet distance requirements (e.g. not within 500 feet of a church, school, daycare, or residential zone, per Huntsville ordinances) for alcohol establishments ³⁴ ³⁵ . If the site is too close to a protected use, you might be denied a liquor license or have to request a variance (which is seldom granted for distance rules).

Building Permits and Health Permits: If you will be renovating the space (installing a bar, restrooms, etc.), you’ll need city building permits. Plans must meet **building code** for an Assembly occupancy (A-2 use group). This includes proper fire-rated walls, emergency exits (at least two exits, with panic hardware if occupancy > 100), emergency lighting, exit signs, and possibly a sprinkler system. *Note:* Under the International Fire Code, **any new bar or nightclub area with occupant load 100+ or over 5,000 sq ft must have a fire sprinkler system** ³⁶ . This can be a major capital expense if not already installed. The Madison County Health Department will require a **Food Service Permit** if you prepare or serve any food (even snacks or popcorn) or provide ice/lemons for drinks (health officials often consider ice a “food” for permitting). If you do not have a kitchen and only serve pre-packaged snacks, you might only need a **Letter of No Food Service** from the Health Dept ¹¹ .

Finally, **sign permits** (for your exterior sign) and any required music licensing (ASCAP/BMI for background music) should be obtained. While music licenses are not government permits, failing to get them can lead to legal trouble if you play music for customers.

Summary Checklist – Licenses/Permits: *Before opening, you should have:*

- **State ABC License** (liquor license for on-premises) **and** City Alcohol Beverage License approval ⁸ .
- **City of Huntsville Business License** (general & liquor tax) for your location ³⁷ .
- **Madison County Privilege Licenses:** Pool hall/table license (with \ \$1,000 bond) ²⁰ , beer & wine retail licenses, etc., obtained from Probate Office.
- **Zoning clearance:** Proper zoning or special exception for a pool hall/bar at your address; Certificate of Occupancy issued.
- **Health Department permit/letter:** If serving any consumables beyond bottled drinks.

- **Building/Fire inspections:** Approvals for occupancy load, fire safety (extinguishers, exit lights, alarm/sprinklers if required), ADA compliance, and overall building code sign-off.

Each of these has fees: see the **License & Permit Table** below for a breakdown.

License & Permit Requirements – At a Glance

License/Permit	Issuing Authority	Cost (Approx.)	Process Time	Renewal
Alabama ABC Liquor License (Lounge Retail Liquor Class I)	Alabama ABC Board (State)	\\$300/year state fee ¹ + \\$100 application fee. City also charges \\$100 app + \\$25 per background check ⁵ ⁶ .	~45–60 days (incl. local approval and ABC processing) ³ .	Renew annually by Sept 30 (state) ¹⁶ . City renewal of liquor privilege tax yearly.
City Alcohol Beverage License	City of Huntsville	Included in above (City's \\$100 filing fee and background check fees) ⁵ . Upon approval, city privilege license tax applies (rate on gross alcohol sales).	Concurrent with ABC process (Council approval within ~30–45 days).	Renew city liquor license tax annually (pay % of alcohol gross).
City Business License	City of Huntsville	\\$150–\\$300 (varies by business type/ estimated revenue; plus additional for liquor sales) ¹⁷ .	1–2 days once other steps complete. Obtained last.	Renew by Jan 1 each year (annual city license tax).
Pool Hall/Table License	Madison Co. Probate (State/ County)	\\$38.50 per table ¹⁸ ¹⁹ (for standard billiard tables) + \\$1,000 surety bond (cost ~\$100/year) ³⁸ .	Same-day issuance once bond filed and ABC/city approval in hand.	Renew annually by Oct 1 ²³ (bond must be kept active; license fee per table yearly).
Retail Beer License (On-Premises)	Madison Co. Probate	~\$75 state + \$37.50 county = \$112.50 + \$1 issuance (est.) depending on city size (for on-site beer) ³⁹ ⁴⁰ .	Same-day (usually with pool hall license).	Annual (Oct 1).

License/Permit	Issuing Authority	Cost (Approx.)	Process Time	Renewal
Retail Table Wine License (On-Premises)	Madison Co. Probate	~\$75 state + \$37.50 county = \$112.50 + \$1 issuance (est.) (for on-site wine).	Same-day with above.	Annual (Oct 1).
Soft Drink License (fountain)	Madison Co. Probate	\$38.50 + \$1 fee ²⁸ ²⁹ (if serving fountain drinks). Bottled/canned: \$4.75.	Same-day.	Annual (Oct 1).
Tobacco Sales License	Madison Co. Probate	~\$25 (if selling cigars, cigarettes) ²⁷ .	Same-day.	Annual (Oct 1).
Certificate of Occupancy	City Inspections/Fire Marshal	Varies (often no fee, or minimal). Construction permits cost based on project value.	Depends on build-out (inspections can take days to weeks).	One-time per build/renovation (updates if occupancy/use changes).
Health Dept. Food Permit	Madison County Health Dept.	\\$50-\\\$150/year (depending on complexity of service). Letter of no-food intent may be no fee.	1-2 weeks (inspection of premises).	Annual (Oct 1 typically).
Sign Permit	City of Huntsville	\\$20-\\\$50 (small fee, plus sign cost).	1 week.	Only if new signage (one-time).
Music/Entertainment License	(ASCAP/BMI, etc.) Private orgs.	~\$250+ annually per org (if playing music publicly).	1-2 weeks.	Annual.

Note: The above costs are estimates for initial budgeting. Alabama also imposes monthly liquor taxes on gross sales (collected by the city/state) which require a separate \\\$8,000 **Liquor Tax Surety Bond** in Huntsville ¹¹ – this bond (different from the pool hall bond) guarantees payment of your liquor excise taxes to the city. The bond might cost a few hundred dollars annually from a bonding company. Always consult the City Finance Department to confirm current rates and bond requirements before opening.

Legal Operating Hours & “Last Call”

Standard Alcohol Service Hours: In Huntsville (Madison County), alcohol **sales** are prohibited between **2:00 AM and 10:00 AM** on any day by local ordinance ⁴¹. This aligns with Alabama’s general law that no alcohol can be sold or served after 2:00 AM statewide ⁴². Practically, your bar must call “last call” sometime before 2:00 AM – typically around **1:30-1:45 AM** – to ensure all drinks are finished by 2:00. By law, **no alcoholic beverages may be served or consumed on premises after 2:00 AM**. After that hour, only

employees (for cleanup) can remain in the establishment ⁴³ . Most bars will have lights up and patrons out the door by 2:00. It's a serious violation to allow customers to possess drinks after the cutoff (the ABC can suspend a license if, for example, they find patrons still drinking at 2:15).

Sunday Sales: Alabama law historically prohibited Sunday alcohol sales except by local referendum. Huntsville voters approved Sunday sales, so licensed establishments **may serve on Sundays** beginning at **12:00 PM (noon)**, continuing up to the 2:00 AM cutoff (which technically falls into Monday morning) ⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ . **No alcohol sales on Sunday morning** before noon are allowed (that includes both on-premise and off-premise). State-run liquor stores are closed Sundays by state law ⁴⁵ , but bars and restaurants in Huntsville can open at noon. Note that some cities/counties in Alabama stop service earlier on Sundays by local ordinance, but Huntsville allows the same 2:00 AM limit (effectively meaning you could serve until 2 AM Monday). Always verify local updates – for instance, small municipalities require special “Sunday Sales” licenses, but Huntsville’s ordinance permits it generally after the noon hour ⁴⁴ .

Special Extended Hours (Midnight Permit): Uniquely, Huntsville’s zoning code requires a **special exception for alcohol service between midnight and 2:00 AM** for certain businesses. By default, new restaurants and bars in some zoning districts might only be allowed to serve alcohol until 12:00 AM. To operate past midnight up to 2 AM, you may need a **“late hours” permit or special exception from the Board of Zoning Adjustment** ³³ . In practice, many Huntsville establishments *do* stay open until 2 AM, so presumably they have obtained this special exception during their zoning approval. For example, the Huntsville BZA meeting minutes show approvals being granted to allow alcohol sales from midnight to 2 AM for certain venues ³³ ⁴⁶ . Be sure to confirm that your location either is in a zoning district that automatically allows 2 AM operation or obtain the exception. Without it, your local privilege license could be conditioned to a midnight closing.

“Last Call” Defined: “Last call” isn’t explicitly defined in statutes, but it is the customary practice of announcing the final opportunity for customers to order alcohol before service stops. In Huntsville, last call announcements are usually made around 1:30 AM. By law, all drinks must be **served** by 2:00 AM, and typically establishments will **cease service a bit earlier** to ensure compliance. After 2:00 AM, **no alcohol can be in customers’ hands** – not just no sales, but consumption must end ⁴³ . Staff will start collecting any remaining drinks at 2:00. It’s advisable to build a buffer: announce last call, do final tabs, and have security or staff sweep the floor right at 2 AM to clear drinks. “Last call” as a concept helps you enforce the hard cutoff.

After-Hours Rules: Once closed, **doors should be locked** to patrons. Alabama law (and your ABC license conditions) prohibit operating as a “bottle club” or allowing BYOB after hours. You cannot let customers stay inside drinking their own alcohol after 2 AM – that would violate the spirit of the law and risk your license. Even employees can only drink after hours in very limited situations (and never to the point of impairment on duty). Essentially, treat 2:00 AM as a firm closing time for alcohol **and** for customer occupancy (some cities mandate all patrons out by 2:15 AM). Plan your operating hours and staffing accordingly, and consider also any local police suggestions – HPD may do extra patrols around closing time to ensure bars are dispersing the crowd on time.

Holiday or Special Exceptions: Alabama does not extend hours for holidays (e.g. New Year’s Eve past 2 AM) unless the law is changed – so assume 2 AM even on big nights. During certain emergencies (like COVID-19 in 2020), the ABC Board temporarily moved last call earlier (such as 11 PM) ⁴⁷ , but those were temporary emergency rules. Under normal operations, stick to the standard hours. If you ever want to host an after-

hours private event *without alcohol*, that might be possible (for example, renting out the space for a late-night private pool tournament where only soft drinks are served). But you should clear such plans with local authorities, and ensure absolutely no alcohol is accessible or consumed after hours.

Building Code & Occupancy Compliance 🏢

Operating a pool hall with alcohol means you'll be classified as an **Assembly occupancy (Group A-2)** under building codes – the same category as restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. This has several important compliance implications:

- **Occupant Load & Exits:** The Fire Marshal will calculate your maximum **occupancy load** based on square footage and layout (e.g. billiards halls might be calculated at ~15 net square feet per person in playing areas, plus bar/seating areas). For example, a 3,000 sq ft venue might easily have a capacity of 100+. The **capacity number must be posted** on a sign, and you **must not exceed it** – overcrowding is a common citation and can lead to immediate closure by the Fire Marshal. Your space must have a sufficient number of **exits** for that capacity: typically two or more exit doors that swing outward, with panic bar hardware if over 50 occupants. Paths to exits must be clear (no pool tables blocking egress) and marked with illuminated **EXIT signs**. Emergency lights that kick on during power loss are required. The Fire Marshal will inspect these before granting your Certificate of Occupancy.
- **Fire Protection Systems:** As noted, if your occupant load is ≥ 100 or the space is over 5,000 sq ft, current codes mandate an **automatic fire sprinkler system** throughout the venue ³⁶. Many modern commercial spaces already have sprinklers; if not, installing one is a significant expense (tens of thousands of dollars) involving adding a water supply, sprinkler heads, and alarm connections. Similarly, you may need smoke detectors, a fire alarm system (for notification), and fire extinguishers (at least 2A10BC rated extinguishers, with one every 75 feet, typically). If your building is older and **sprinklers are not present**, talk to the city building department – sometimes small A-2 venues under the threshold can operate without sprinklers, but any increase in size or renovation could trigger the requirement. The **International Fire Code 2021** added strict retrofit rules for A-2 occupancies due to fire fatalities, so don't be surprised if sprinklers are insisted upon for safety ⁴⁸.
- **Bathroom Facilities:** Health and plumbing codes require a certain number of restrooms/fixtures based on occupancy and sex. For Assembly, roughly 1 toilet and 1 lavatory per 40 males and per 40 females is required (exact ratio depends on code edition). A large capacity (say 120 people) might need 3 men's toilets (or urinals) and 3 women's toilets minimum. If your building's existing restrooms are insufficient, you may need to add fixtures – which can significantly impact your floor plan and budget. Also, **ADA Accessibility** standards require that at least one restroom (and ideally one for each gender) be fully accessible: proper door widths, grab bars, accessible sink, etc. Space for a wheelchair to turn (5-ft diameter circle) is needed inside restrooms. When renovating, factor in these ADA upgrades. An **ADA compliance** audit is wise: you need an accessible entry (ramp or level entrance), no protruding hazards for visually impaired, and at least some accessible seating area. Even if your building is older (grandfathering only goes so far – major renovations trigger full compliance upgrades).

- **Floor Plan Considerations:** Pool tables themselves require space – usually about a 5-foot clearance around each for play. This naturally limits how many people can crowd in. However, you still should plan for **crowd movement**: designate clear aisles or pathways to exits, the bar, and restrooms. The fire code will look at **egress width** – typically you need 0.2 inches of exit door width per occupant for sprinklered buildings (0.15 in/occ if sprinklered, or up to 0.2 if not). For instance, 100 occupants * 0.2 = 20 inches of required exit width, which two standard 36-inch doors easily cover. But if you had 300 occupants, you'd need 60 inches total exit width, meaning at least two double-doors. Keep these technical points in mind if configuring a larger venue.
- **Zoning: late-night and entertainment:** Huntsville may have specific zoning rules for “recreational venues” or pool halls. One potential restriction: if adjacent to residential zones, there could be enforceable noise limits or even hours limitations (beyond the alcohol service law). Check if the property has any conditional use conditions (some businesses have to agree “no music after 11 PM” or similar as part of their approval). Additionally, **distance requirements:** Both Alabama law and city code often prohibit issuing a liquor license if the premises is within a certain distance (often 500 feet) of a church, school, or daycare ⁴⁹. Madison County local law sets 1,000 feet from a school or church as a limit for new liquor licensees ⁴⁹. Huntsville’s ordinance defines these “protected uses” and measures the distance (likely property line to property line). Always verify via a survey or city planning that you clear these distances. Being too close can outright bar you from getting a license unless an exemption exists.
- **Signage and Postings:** The building/fire code will require exit signs as mentioned. But also note, Alabama’s pool hall law still requires you to **post certain signs**, e.g. **“Law as to Minors”** – historically, a placard with the text of Alabama Code §34-6-9 (which forbade minors from playing billiards) had to be posted in a conspicuous place ⁵⁰. Although that specific section was repealed in 2015, it’s wise to post “No Under 21 Allowed” (or whatever age rules apply) signs at your entrance to avoid confusion and to visibly back up your ID policy. You’ll also need to post your business licenses, occupancy load sign, and any required labor law posters (if you have employees). Also consider “No Smoking” signage if required – Alabama allows local smoking ordinances; ensure compliance if Huntsville restricts indoor smoking (many Alabama cities do for restaurants/bars).

Bottom line: budget for **initial build-out costs** to meet code – possibly adding sprinklers, fire alarms, extra exits, ramps or lifts for accessibility, bathroom expansions, etc. These capital expenditures can be significant and are often where new owners underestimate the time and money required. Always get inspections and permits – running a clandestine operation without proper CO or over capacity can result in immediate shutdown by fire authorities, which is far costlier in the long run.

Special Rules for Pool Halls (Billiard Rooms)

Operating a pool room in Alabama comes with **extra legal quirks** beyond the standard bar rules:

- **No Gambling or Betting:** Alabama law explicitly forbids **gambling in billiard rooms**. This goes beyond obvious casino-style gambling – it includes common pool-related bets or games of chance. The law names games like *Kelly pool*, *keno*, *star pool*, *scrub* and similar as **illegal** in a pool hall ⁵¹. You cannot allow any betting pools (even sports pools) on the premises ⁵². Expect law enforcement or ABC agents to pay close attention that your pool hall isn’t running any side hustles like a poker room or back-room dice games. Violation is a misdemeanor that, on second offense, can be elevated to a

felony ⁵³ – and it would also trigger a claim on your \$1,000 pool hall bond ²². **Enforcement tip:** Don't even keep dice or cards on premises, as their presence could be construed as facilitating gambling. Also, **no coin-operated devices that are gambling** (like video poker machines) – those are illegal in AL. Stick to pool, darts, etc., and make sure any tournament prizes are compliant with ABC promotions rules ⁵².

- **Underage Restrictions:** Pool halls that serve alcohol must be adults-only in practice. Alabama's billiard hall statutes used to forbid minors (under 19) from even entering a pool hall – that specific law was repealed ⁵⁴, but **another provision now bans underage customers if alcohol is being sold during extended hours** ⁵⁵. In simple terms, since you will have a full bar, you should plan to admit **21+ only** at all times. **No one under legal drinking age should be on the premises** when alcohol is available ⁵⁵. (If you were operating a non-alcoholic pool hall, you could allow 18-year-olds, but once you add alcohol, treat it as a bar.) Make this policy clear: check IDs at the door and post signs ("Must be 21 to enter"). Note: employees who are 19 or 20 may be allowed to serve alcohol under certain conditions (Alabama's ABC rules allow 19–20 year olds to be servers or bartenders if certified under the Responsible Vendor Program, except they cannot personally serve spirits in some cases). But as for patrons, keep it 21+ to avoid any violation for minors *loitering*. The pool hall law still makes it a violation to "knowingly allow minors to play or loiter" ⁵⁶. So even a teenager hanging out watching big brother shoot pool could put your license at risk. Enforce age rules strictly.
- **Pool Table Operations & Taxes:** If your tables are coin-operated (e.g. coin or electronic slots to release balls), Alabama law treats them as amusement devices. You might need a separate **coin-operated machine license decal** for each table (usually obtained through the Alabama Department of Revenue or county). Ensure each pool table license (the one under §40-12-146) is visibly **displayed or the decal affixed**, as inspectors may check for current stickers. Also, **table fees vs. hourly rental:** however you charge (per game via coin drop, or by hourly rental from a counter), keep good records because that revenue is subject to sales tax and the city's business license gross receipts tax.
- **Sanitation:** A lesser-known rule in the billiard law: you must maintain the pool room in a **sanitary condition** (this likely refers to general cleanliness, restrooms, etc.), or it could be deemed a violation of your pool hall license ⁵⁶. Health inspectors (if you have a food permit) will check restrooms and overall cleanliness. Even without food service, expect the city or county to respond to any complaints about unsanitary conditions. Provide waste baskets, clean the restrooms regularly, and keep debris off the floor (for safety as well). This is not just good practice but part of legal compliance – the pool hall bond conditions mention not maintaining sanitary conditions as a cause for a claim ⁵⁷.
- **No "Secret Passages" or Immoral Acts:** Amusingly, the old law prohibits having any secret passage or hidden rooms connected to your pool hall that could be used for gambling or "immoral purposes" ⁵⁸. Essentially, don't have a speakeasy poker room behind a bookshelf. This is antiquated language, but be aware that if your building has a back room, keep it accessible and free of illicit use. Law enforcement can inspect your premises at any time since you're licensed; you do not want them finding a surprise.
- **Posting of Rules:** As mentioned, you're required to **post the text of certain laws** in the establishment (specifically the law about minors, previously §34-6-9) ⁵⁹. The safest approach is to post a sign that clearly states **"No one under 21 allowed. Gambling is prohibited. Violators will be prosecuted."** Many pool halls also post house rules (e.g. how table rental works, time limits, "We ID

everyone under 30,” etc.). Having these signs not only fulfills legal requirements (where applicable) but also demonstrates to inspectors that you are aware of and communicating the rules.

- **Additional Local Rules:** Check if Huntsville has any ordinances specific to “billiard halls” or arcades. Some locales require a separate city permit for arcades or have curfews for minors in pool halls (again, largely moot if you’re 21+ only). Huntsville’s Code of Ordinances Chapter 3 (Alcoholic Beverages) and any relevant Chapter in Appendix A (Zoning) would be the places to look. For example, many cities in Alabama require any business with coin-operated amusement devices to close by midnight unless otherwise permitted – this goes hand in hand with the special exception for late-night alcohol. Since you will in any case be stopping alcohol at 2 AM, you’ll comply by default, but just ensure no local law bars non-alcoholic late-night activity. Given the structure of Huntsville’s code, the midnight-to-2am exception likely covers all operations.

Enforcement: Common Pitfalls and Inspection Patterns

Once you’re up and running, various agencies will be keeping an eye on compliance. Here are the key enforcement concerns and how to avoid trouble:

- **Underage Sales/Stings:** Arguably the #1 enforcement focus is preventing sales of alcohol to minors. Huntsville Police and Alabama ABC agents **conduct sting operations** where undercover operatives (under 21) will attempt to purchase alcohol. If your staff serves a minor, you can expect an immediate citation or even an arrest. The ABC Board penalties can include hefty fines and license suspension for first offenses, and revocation for repeat offenses. **How to avoid:** Rigid ID checking. Accept only valid government IDs, and train staff to spot fakes. Alabama’s Responsible Vendor Program training (which is required for licensees to mitigate penalties) will instill carding procedures – e.g. **check ID for anyone who looks under 30**, use an ID scanner or app to verify, and use wristbands or hand stamps if you have mixed-age events (though as a 21+ venue, you likely won’t allow underage in at all). A single slip-up can jeopardize your business, so emphasize this to all employees: *no ID, no service, no exceptions*. Also be mindful of not serving visibly intoxicated persons – overserving is another enforcement target (less common than underage stings, but ABC will act on violations).
- **Noise and Neighborhood Complaints:** If your poolroom is freestanding and not near residences, this may not be a big issue. But if nearby neighbors (especially in mixed-use districts or adjacent to residential areas) hear loud music or patron noise late at night, they will call authorities. Huntsville likely has a **noise ordinance** setting maximum decibels at the property line during night hours. Regular complaints can trigger visits from police or even a review of your privilege license by the City Council. Common solutions: keep any amplified music at a reasonable level (you might not be a dance club, but even loud jukebox music or shouted conversation outside can cause issues past midnight). Have staff or security step outside periodically to gauge noise. Especially at closing time, monitor patrons as they leave – rowdy behavior in the parking lot can lead to disorderly conduct issues and a bad reputation with the neighborhood. The city can impose additional conditions or reduce your hours if noise becomes a chronic problem.
- **Overcrowding & Fire Code Violations:** Fire Marshals in Huntsville can do unscheduled inspections, especially if they see a packed house on a weekend. They will count heads and check for blocked exits. Overcapacity or locked/blocked exits are very serious violations – they can **shut you down on**

the spot for the night (or until corrected) if they find these. Ensure you never exceed your posted occupancy. Train your door staff to click-count if needed and **stop entry when at capacity**. Don't let people pile in around tournament tables beyond safe limits. Also, keep exit pathways clear: that means no storing boxes, cases of beer, etc., in front of exit doors or in exit hallways. During busy nights, do a periodic walk to make sure patron chairs or cues haven't encroached into the exit route. Maintain all **emergency equipment**: exit lights illuminated, fire extinguishers serviced annually, and if you have a sprinkler or alarm, it must be monitored and kept in working order (fire department will inspect these yearly). Non-compliance can lead to fines or forced closure until fixed.

- **Employee Regulations & Security:** Alabama Alcoholic Beverage laws require that anyone serving or dispensing alcohol have suitable training (Responsible Vendor Program certification) and that they be 19 or older. Keep records of your employees' certifications – ABC agents can ask for proof of training. If you employ any security personnel, be aware that **armed security guards** must be licensed in Alabama. Even unarmed "bouncers" should ideally have an Alabama Security Regulatory Board license if they work for a security company. If they're in-house employees, formal licensing may not be mandated, but they should be trained on use-of-force limits and legal obligations (i.e. when to involve police). A mistake by security (like injuring a patron or violating their rights) can bring legal trouble or prompt police scrutiny. Also, **do not use "unlicensed" door promoters or DJs who might do something to risk your license** (e.g. some club promoters have run afoul of alcohol laws by offering free drinks without permission). Always maintain control over promotions and ensure they comply with ABC rules (no illegal drink specials, etc.).
- **ABC Inspections and Paperwork:** The ABC Board can inspect your premises and records at any time. They often check for things like: all alcohol bottles must be ABC-stamped (no untaxed liquor), accurate liquor inventory records, no refilling bottles, and that your monthly **alcohol tax reports** are being filed/payed. Ensure you file required monthly reports (sales and taxes) to state and city on time. Also, keep your **Liquor Tax Bond** valid (the \$8,000 bond Huntsville requires ¹¹) – if it lapses and you don't renew it, the city can suspend your license to sell liquor.
- **Sanitation/Health Inspections:** If you have a health permit (for any food service), expect 2-3 inspections per year by the county health inspector. Common failure points: fruit fly or pest infestations (bars with spilled drinks and garnishes can attract bugs – keep things clean nightly), improper dishwashing of glassware (you'll need a commercial glasswasher or a strict 3-compartment sink procedure with sanitizer), and lack of hot water or soap at sinks. Even without a full kitchen, you must meet health codes for ice handling and utensil washing. A critical violation (like sewage backup or no water) can get you shut down on the spot until fixed. Regularly train staff on basic hygiene (wash hands, etc.) – not only for health compliance but patrons appreciate cleanliness, especially in a pool hall environment that can get grimy.
- **Taxes and Financial Compliance:** Aside from licenses, ensure you remit all taxes: sales tax on food/drink, liquor taxes, and any applicable lodging or rental taxes if you rent equipment. Alabama Department of Revenue and the city can audit your sales. Failure to pay taxes (or bouncing a tax payment) is a quick way to lose your license. Huntsville has yanked business licenses of bars that didn't pay their liquor taxes ⁶⁰. So keep your books clean.
- **Triggers for Fines or Closure:** Summarizing the above, the most common triggers for fines are: selling to minors (fine or suspension), allowing after-hours drinking (likely suspension/fine),

overcapacity (fine), excessive noise (fine or restrictions), unapproved security practices (could be fine), and failing to renew licenses on time (late fees or forced closure until paid). Repeated serious violations, like multiple underage sales or acts of violence on-site, could trigger a **license revocation hearing**. Huntsville's Liquor License Review Committee monitors establishments – if you accumulate a record of police incidents, they can recommend the City Council revoke your license. This happened to at least one problematic venue in recent years. To avoid this, work proactively with law enforcement and neighbors to address issues before they escalate.

Operational Implications (Security, ID Checks, Staffing) ♀

Running a late-night pool bar means you should adopt a mindset of “**safety and compliance first**” in daily operations. Here's what that entails:

- **Trained Security Staff:** While not explicitly required by law to have bouncers, it's **expected** for any venue open past midnight with alcohol to have some security presence. This can be doormen checking IDs and managing capacity, and floor personnel monitoring the crowd. For a pool hall, security should also enforce game rules and prevent fights (competitive games and alcohol can be a volatile mix). Consider hiring professional security or off-duty police on peak nights. Off-duty police officers (in uniform) can be hired in Huntsville, and having them on site greatly deters bad behavior – some clubs do this on weekends despite the extra cost because it can prevent incidents that would be far costlier. At minimum, ensure **one sober, alert staff member per ~50 patrons** is tasked with security oversight. All security should be easily identifiable (shirts or badges) and should have clear instructions on how to de-escalate conflicts and when to call 911.
- **ID Checking Procedures: Every patron gets carded** – period. The entrance is your critical checkpoint. For efficiency and accuracy, use an **electronic ID scanner** that can read driver's licenses (and detect fakes or expired IDs). Many Huntsville clubs now use ID scanners and even share ban lists of troublesome patrons across venues ⁶¹ ⁶² . While not mandated, investing in this technology can protect you: it logs who entered and when, which is useful if an incident occurs. It also helps you enforce bans on individuals who caused fights or other problems (you can flag them in the system). Train your door staff not only to check birthdates, but also to spot signs of someone using another person's ID (nervousness, physical description mismatch). Keep a confiscated ID log if you take any fake IDs (and turn them over to police or ABC as required). Remember, under Alabama law, a **minor misrepresenting their age** is an offense, but it's the seller's duty to verify age – so diligence is key.
- **Surveillance Cameras:** It's wise to install a **CCTV system** covering key areas: entry/exit, the bar counter, cash register, and the gaming floor. Again, this is not a legal requirement but is becoming an industry standard for liability and security. If a fight breaks out or a theft occurs, you have video evidence. Police also appreciate when bars have video footage of any criminal activity. Make sure you post the required “Notice: These Premises Monitored by Video” if needed by Alabama's security laws. Keep recordings for a reasonable time (30 days or more) in case issues surface later. Having cameras can also protect you against false liability claims (slip-and-fall scams, etc.) – valuable for insurance purposes.
- **Crowd Management:** As the night goes on and people drink more, you need strategies to keep things orderly. **Past midnight**, consider slightly lowering music volume and increasing lighting a notch – subtly encouraging a calmer atmosphere. Some venues implement a **dress code or code of**

conduct to screen out patrons more likely to cause trouble (e.g., no gang colors, no excessively baggy clothing that can hide weapons). Ensure you have **functional metal detectors or pat-down procedures** if your risk assessment calls for it. Not every pool hall will need this, but if you anticipate large crowds or have had weapons incidents in the area, it may be prudent (coordinate with local police on best practices). Keep in mind, **weapons policy**: Alabama allows concealed carry in many places, but private businesses can prohibit firearms on premises (post “No Firearms” signs if you choose to). If you do allow lawful carry, you must be even more vigilant in diffusing heated situations so it never escalates to gun violence. Many bars opt to ban weapons for this reason.

- **Incident Response Plan:** Have a clear plan that staff know: if a fight starts, what do they do? (E.g., Security intervenes if safe, another staff immediately calls police if it’s serious or weapons seen). Document all incidents in a nightly log – note the people involved, actions taken, and whether police were called. If there’s an injury, offer to call EMS. Showing regulators that you are **proactive and responsible in handling incidents** can make a huge difference if your license ever comes up for review. Also, if an incident is serious (e.g. a patron is hurt or there’s a big brawl), you should self-report to the ABC or at least to local police liaison. It’s better they hear it from you with an explanation of how you responded, rather than only seeing the police report.
- **Late-Night Practices:** After midnight, it’s common that additional measures kick in. For example, some places enforce **no re-entry after 1 AM** (to prevent people from going to their car to chug booze or grab weapons, then coming back). Many will also **stop music 15 minutes before closing** to encourage people to finish up and leave calmly, and flash lights at last call. Figure out what works for your crowd and be consistent so patrons expect it. As a pool hall, you might announce “rack up your final games” when approaching closing time. Also, ensure **taxi/rideshare availability** – intoxicated patrons should not drive. Post numbers for Uber/Lyft or local cabs, maybe even partner with a rideshare for discount codes. Police do monitor for DUI around bar closing; you keeping drunk drivers off the road is part of being a good community member (and it shields you from potential dram shop liability).
- **Staffing Costs & Needs:** Operating late (past midnight) means higher labor costs (you must compensate staff for undesirable hours) and possibly security staff which can run \$15–\$30/hour per guard, or \$40+/hour for off-duty officers. Factor in these costs to your feasibility. Additionally, late hours may require you to provide meals or breaks for staff per labor laws – ensure you schedule rotations so that, say, your bartender can grab a bite or rest if working a long evening shift. Fatigued staff make mistakes, whether it’s a security lapse or a cash-handling error. So don’t skimp on having enough people on duty. A typical late-night pool bar might have: 1–2 bartenders, 1 bar-back/busser, 1 front door person, 1–2 floor security, and maybe a manager on duty. That’s ~5–6 people, which at \$10–\$20/hour each (varying roles) for late-night premiums is a considerable hourly expense. You need enough business volume to justify staying open very late.
- **Insurance and Liability:** While not a direct “operational requirement,” it’s highly advisable to carry robust **liquor liability insurance** and general liability insurance. Alabama’s dram shop law can hold you liable if you overserve someone who then causes injury. Insurance is your safety net. Insurers may *require* certain best practices (some will insist you have security training, ID checks documented, perhaps even cameras) or they may give discounts if you do. In any case, document everything: incidents, training sessions with employees (keep a log of training on carding and safety),

maintenance of safety equipment, etc. This documentation not only helps in enforcement situations but also in legal or insurance defenses.

By implementing these measures, you create a safer environment that is **less prone to enforcement action**. Police and ABC agents will notice if your establishment is well-run – they talk about which bars are “trouble spots” and which are compliant. Aim to be in the compliant category so that if a rare mistake happens, regulators are more inclined to work with you (or issue a warning) rather than drop the hammer.

Feasibility of Operating “Open All Night” in Huntsville

Given the legal and practical constraints, running a truly **24-hour pool hall** in Huntsville is **not feasible** when alcohol is involved. Here’s why:

- **Legal Barriers:** Alabama law outright prohibits alcohol sales after 2 AM and before 10 AM ⁴¹. Thus, a business model of staying open all night serving drinks is impossible. Even staying open but “dry” (no alcohol service) during those early-morning hours would be problematic. Huntsville’s local ordinances and state law expect alcohol-licensed premises to be closed to the public after service hours ⁴³. If you attempted to operate as, say, a 24-hour pool venue by stopping alcohol at 2 AM and continuing with just billiards and soft drinks until morning, you would face practical challenges: law enforcement would likely scrutinize the activity to ensure no after-hours drinking is occurring, and you might run afoul of any local ordinance intended to curb late-night loitering. It’s worth noting many jurisdictions have laws against “bottle clubs” or after-hours clubs – Alabama is no exception, aiming to prevent unregulated after-hour alcohol consumption.
- **Enforcement & Permitting:** Huntsville’s zoning special exceptions (for midnight-2 AM) suggest that **2 AM is the latest closing time contemplated** by local regulators ³³. There is no provision for any business of this type to operate 24/7. Any attempt to do so would likely require a separate classification (for example, Waffle House diners or 24-hr restaurants can be 24hr, but a pool hall with a liquor license is viewed differently). Your privilege license from the city might even stipulate hours of operation. If you deviated and kept doors open all night, the police may treat your venue as a nuisance or assume you’re allowing illegal after-hours alcohol. The risk-to-reward ratio is not favorable.
- **Security Needs and Costs:** From a safety standpoint, the hours between 2 AM and 6 AM are the highest-risk for crime and disorder, as bars empty out and more inebriated or ill-intentioned individuals roam. If you were open late, you could become a magnet for folks who got kicked out elsewhere at 2 AM. This “late-night crowd” tends to be more prone to fights or other issues (they’ve been drinking all night already). To manage this, you would need **heavy security** presence in the wee hours, likely including off-duty officers, which is very costly (and even off-duty police might be reluctant to work a venue operating that late). Your staffing costs would soar while customer volume would dwindle after last call – not a viable financial trade-off.
- **Staffing Challenges:** Hiring employees to work overnight shifts in a recreational setting is difficult. Bartenders and servers expect to finish by around 2 or 3 AM at the latest. Very few will want to work a graveyard shift with no alcohol sales (hence low tips) just supervising pool games and soft drinks. You’d likely have to pay a graveyard wage premium, further eroding profitability. Employee safety

becomes an issue too – leaving at 5 AM with cash from the register could make them targets, for example.

- **Lack of Customer Demand:** Realistically, the demand for playing pool without alcohol at 4 AM is minimal. Most patrons at that hour would likely be those already intoxicated (which raises liability if they hang around) or those involved in illicit activities. After alcohol service ends, revenue would plummet – you'd be paying staff and security while making almost no sales. Unless you had a specific niche (e.g., an all-night pool tournament for charity, which could be a one-off event with special permission), regular all-night operation doesn't attract enough paying customers to justify costs. In fact, many bars find diminishing returns even staying open between midnight and 2 AM on weeknights.
- **Potential for Problems:** With no legitimate revenue stream late at night, some venues are tempted to allow "BYOB after hours" or under-the-table sales – which are **illegal** and would be game over for your license if caught. Additionally, late-night hours often correlate with increased likelihood of violence (as people get more intoxicated or other criminal elements show up). If an incident were to occur at 3 or 4 AM when technically you're not even supposed to be open, it would be very hard to defend your license. The authorities would almost certainly shut you down.

Conclusion: To operate profitably and legally, you should plan to **close by 2 AM** (2:00 is the absolute latest for any alcohol service, with patrons exiting immediately thereafter). "Open all night" is not a viable option in Huntsville for an alcohol-serving poolroom. Instead, focus on the prime hours (late afternoon through 12 AM on weekdays, and up to 2 AM on weekends) and do them well. If you want to cater to an early crowd, you could open in the morning for say coffee and billiards *only* on special occasions (some places do weekend morning leagues without alcohol), but even that should be cleared with ABC (they may not object to you being open in the morning as long as you're not selling alcohol before allowed hours). Generally, however, your revenue will come from the evening/night crowd.

The **feasibility analysis** is that extended hours beyond the legal limit would introduce high security costs, staffing difficulties, and major legal risks – all for very little benefit. It's far more sensible to comply with the standard operating hours and put your effort into providing a safe, enjoyable experience during those times. Huntsville authorities will expect that by 2:00 AM your lights are off and doors closed like every other bar. Trying to skirt that could not only result in fines or license revocation ⁶³, but also endanger your patrons and staff.

Focus instead on being the **best pool hall in town within the allowed hours**: well-regulated, friendly, and compliant. That is the path to long-term success without running afoul of the law. **In summary, 24-hour operation is essentially a non-starter under Alabama's regulatory framework for alcohol establishments** – the cons greatly outweigh the pros.

Sources:

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- Alabama ABC Board – License Types & Fees ¹; State alcohol laws summary ⁴²
- Alabama Code Title 34, Chapter 6 (Billiard Rooms) – Key provisions on gambling, minors, licensing ⁵¹ ⁷

- Alabama Title 40, Chapter 12 – State/County business license requirements (pool tables, etc.) ¹⁸ ²⁰
- Jet Insurance Co. – Alabama Pool Room Bond explanation (compliance requirements) ²¹ ²²
- Huntsville local ordinances – Hours of sale and special exceptions for late-night operations ⁴¹ ³³
- International Fire Code 2021 – A-2 occupancy sprinkler requirements ³⁶ .

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