



MEMO IN OPPOSITION

Wine in Grocery Stores – No Compromise

The Last Store on Main Street Coalition, which represents thousands of wine and liquor store owners from every community in New York State, is firmly opposed to Assemblyman Morelle's legislation that would legalize the sale of wine in grocery stores.

While this legislation is supposed to represent a “compromise” supported by the industry, this bill is supported only by those stores operated by Big Box stores. The thousands of small businesses owners – the mom and pop stores that represent one of the last bastions of small business not yet destroyed by Big Box stores – that truly represent the industry oppose this bill as strongly as we opposed Governor Paterson’s proposal.

The idea that small wine shops, many of which are under 1,200 square feet, would benefit from selling a few food items and would be able to compete with massive grocery stores that sell thousands of items as a result represents a flawed understanding of the industry. In truth, this legislation would have the same impact as the Governor’s plan – it would force more than 1,000 stores to close around the state and put more than 4,500 people out of work.

The wine stores are already feeling the impact of the struggling economy as customers spend less in their shops. In addition, the legislature’s decision to increase the excise tax on wine and liquor – a step the industry has accepted as its contribution to helping solve the budget deficit – has also had an impact. In these difficult economic times, we all need to work together to protect jobs and rebuild our economy. We should not waste time and money fighting for larger profits for Big Box stores, many of which are located in other states.

It’s also important to remember that the grocery stores pushing for compromise are the same people who have destroyed small businesses for years. There is no compromising with the Big Box stores who have put local butcher stores out of business, who have crushed local bakeries, who are destroying independent pharmacists. There is no compromise on legislation that will destroy multigenerational family-run businesses so that Big Box stores can add one more item to their shelves.

Finally, there is no compromise on the idea that wine – a controlled substance that has twice the alcohol content of beer – should be made “more convenient” for teenagers to purchase.

Despite grocery store claims that teens don't drink wine, a Columbia University survey of teenagers who have had alcohol found that teenage girls overwhelmingly favor wine over beer if given the choice. In addition, a review of State Liquor Authority violations for the sale of alcohol to minors over the last five years revealed that 90 percent of the violations came in grocery and convenience stores. This is a dangerous combination that makes plain that legalizing the sale of wine in grocery stores will lead to more underage drinking.

The Coalition firmly believes the current system works best for New York by providing good jobs for thousands of people, and provides strong controls over access to potent alcohol products like wine and liquor to combat underage drinking.

This legislation, however well intentioned, would be like putting up a "Going Out of Business" sign in store windows all across New York State.

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