

Good morning, Chairman Stefano, Chairman Brewster, and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Alex Baloga, and I am the president and CEO of the Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association, a trade association that advocates for food retailers, wholesalers, and affiliated businesses in Pennsylvania. Our nearly 800 retail members operate more than 3,500 food stores, employing over 200,000 people. Thanks to recent action by the General Assembly, many of our retail members now offer wine and beer to their customers.

While our association has not endorsed legislation at this point, we are studying the proposals before the Senate and House and are grateful to be invited to offer our perspective.

We support increased consumer choice and convenience for our customers and, in the case of expanded spirits availability, additional outlets for Pennsylvania distilleries to offer their products, particularly in light of the growing popularity of such businesses.

Toward that end, we number of the concepts included in them, namely:

- Removing restrictions on merchandising;
- Ending register segregation and quantity restrictions;
- Conversion of unused licenses;
- Inter-county sales of unbidden licenses; and
- Expanded availability of spirits

We commend the sponsors of the bills being discussed here today for recognizing these needs and drafting legislation to begin the process of updating our laws.

As we have on similar issues, we want to work with legislators, administration officials, and fellow stakeholders to put together a package that moves the ball forward for our members and, more importantly, for their customers.

Expanding this burgeoning market is a logical continuation of state policy. Today, the state tourism website - visitpa.com - includes a list of “Must-See Cideries and Distilleries in Pennsylvania.” Plus, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture plans to award over \$400,000 in grants for specialty crops specific to distilling or brewing under the Specialty Crop Block Grant program. Thanks to your leadership, the commonwealth is growing more attractive for such businesses each day.





*Advocating the views of convenience stores, supermarkets,
independent grocers, wholesalers and consumer product vendors.*

As the number of licensed retailers across the state grows, our members are proud of their work in offering beer and wine to customers while keeping it out of the wrong hands. PFMA members recognize their critical role in the safe and responsible sales of alcoholic beverages.

Toward that end, they employ strict age-proofing standards, many carding every customer for every sale, every time. Whether preventing sales to those under age 21 or to visibly intoxicated persons, our members continually teach their employees about detecting fake photo IDs and recognizing when a customer must not be served. Accordingly, we thank the members and staff of the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board for the valuable training resources and opportunities they provide to retailers. We remain committed to working with state and municipal authorities to ensure that convenience never comes at the cost of safety.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome your questions.



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