



Written Testimony opposing SB 253

Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee
January 31, 2024

Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jeff Breault and I have owned R&J Discount Liquor in Wichita Kansas since 1999. I employ 18 to 20 people, mostly full-time. We offer a retirement plan with matched contributions and pay half of an employee's healthcare costs. Most of our employees have been with us for years, not weeks or months. We make a point of re-investing in our community. The liquor laws in Kansas have promoted the ability of a Kansan to own and operate a business IN Kansas, on a level playing field with others.

My fellow store owners have worked with the Legislature over the last several years to adjust the statutes over time to best serve the public and provide a predictable business environment for our stores. Even with that cooperation, we have lost 38 stores since the Beer law was passed in 2017. More stores have closed than this, with some being replaced in cities. Undoubtedly that lost store number would be much higher had it not been for the pandemic that temporarily shifted sales from the on-premise locations to our retail outlets.

Now, after a once in a lifetime catastrophic event like the pandemic, large out of state operators are approaching Kansas to change our laws for their benefit. We cooperated with the restaurants when they requested to-go sales, originally meant to be temporary but now part of the statute. Most liquor stores adapted during the pandemic also by allowing carryout, curbside delivery. Consumers have shown that both are a popular choice. While doing these changes, we have always maintained our compliance with all the liquor control laws. We agree with the ABC that alcoholic beverage distribution should be regulated. This proposal allows unlicensed contractors to receive and deliver product with little to no hope of oversight. State regulatory agencies are simply not even close to being equipped to oversee these transactions and relationships. Multi-million dollar companies that are intent on gathering consumer data and taking control of retail sales are simply going to run roughshod over our laws and consumer protections.

There have been many challenges for both independent businesses and the state agencies that regulate them. There may be a time for an expansion of liquor distribution methods to the public, but this is certainly not it. Alcohol should not be sold and delivered like a pizza. The wrong person eating a pizza (or getting 3 of them in one night) is a risk we can take; allowing unlicensed indiscriminate delivery of intoxicating products is not a risk we should be taking at this time without much further research.

Please know that R&J Discount Liquor will continue to do our best to uphold the safe and legal sales that are required by our state license. Thank you for your consideration of my comments today.

Sincerely,

Jeff Breault
Owner
R&J Discount Liquor
3015 E Douglas Ave, Wichita, KS 67211