

# Kansas: Liquor store owners resist Kansas compromise on beer

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For years, liquor stores successfully blocked legislation to allow the sale of full-strength beer in grocery and convenience stores in Kansas.

This year the grocers and convenience store owners came up with a compromise for state lawmakers: Let them sell full-strength beer and let the liquor stores sell mixers, ice and foodstuffs.

But the liquor stores aren't budging. They told lawmakers Thursday that allowing grocery and convenience stores to sell full-strength beer would jeopardize their business and create a host of alcohol enforcement problems.

"It's just essential that strong beer stays in the liquor stores," said Larry Knackstedt, owner of an Overland Park liquor store. "Otherwise, many (liquor stores) just wouldn't be able to stay in business."

Current law limits non-liquor stores to selling beer that's no more than 3.2 percent alcohol by weight. Grocery and convenience store owners have long lobbied lawmakers to change the law, but so far the state's liquor store lobby has fought off all attempts.

The slightly weaker beer that grocery stores now sell was created in the 1930s as a way to circumvent Prohibition. Although Prohibition ended in Kansas in 1948, the 3.2 beer remained the only option for grocers.

"Liquor stores are legislatively protected," said Tom Palace, a lobbyist for convenience stores and gas stations. "Competition helps the consumer. The consumer feels what we sell is an inferior product. It's a matter of fairness."

If the bill under consideration passes, gas stations, convenience and grocery stores could sell beer with up to 4 percent alcohol, which

includes most domestic brands. Sales of other types of alcohol would remain limited to liquor stores.

But liquor store owners say the change would put more beer in the hands of minors and cause more alcohol-related accidents. And they worry that grocery stores could sell beer at lower prices than liquor stores because they sell so many other goods.

Hearings continue next week.

Rep. Bob Grant, a Democrat from Cherokee, said he doesn't think there's really much difference between the 3.2 percent beer in grocery stores and the stronger stuff. in liquor stores.

"If you drink enough," Grant said, "you can get drunk."