

Tennessee: Sub-Committee Votes Against Wine In Grocery Stores Bill

Source: News Channel 5

April 13, 2011

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - A house sub-committee shoots down a bill that would allow grocery stores in Tennessee to sell wine.

The measure sponsored by Republican Rep. Jon Lundberg of Bristol failed Wednesday in the House State and Local Government Sub-committee when the panel voted to delay the measure until 2012.

"It's frustrating ,because I don't think our legislators are representing the voters," said shopper Libby Christmas, upon hearing the news.

State lawmakers had listened to the debate over the issue, but had never taken a formal vote until late Wednesday.

It was standing room only in the crowded committee hearing at Legislative Plaza on Wednesday.

Lundberg tried unsuccessfully to pass an amendment Wednesday that would let voters decide by referendum whether they want wine in their grocery stores.

The companion bill was delayed last month in the Senate State and Local Government Committee for two weeks.

Supporters of wine in grocery stores said if the bill passed, it would add thousands of jobs and millions to Tennessee's economy.

Shoppers we talked to say it's all about convenience. In fact, a recent poll done by MTSU found 69 percent of Tennesseans are in favor of allowing wine sales in grocery stores.

"I'm from Illinois originally, and they have it in gas stations, they have it in Walmarts, it's just so different than it is here," said shopper Dawn Kidwell.

During debate before the vote was taken on Wednesday, some lawmakers expressed concern for the 563 liquor store owners in this state, who would lose 30-percent of their sales if the bill passed.

"There's not going to be a 25-percent increase in sales, that represents 10 million bottles of wine, and we are not going to see that happen, you don't create drinkers, where there weren't drinkers before," said Bard Quillman with Red Dog Wine & Spirits.

Liquor and wine store owners call the vote a victory, while supporters said they will be back next year to try and convince lawmakers it's time for a chance.

"It's eventually going to happen, and you would have to agree, we have moved this ball down the field further than it was four years ago," said Jarron Spring with the Tennessee Grocer's Association. "And it takes time to move these things and we are going to pass this someday, and it's incomprehensible that today, they wouldn't allow the people back home, to vote on this issue. It's frustrating to retailers, it's frustrating to consumers."

This is the fourth year lawmakers have tried to pass the bill. Currently, grocery stores can't sell wine and liquor stores can't sell beer.

(The Associated Press Contributed To This Report.)