

VOTE NO on Ballot Question 1

9/25/06 - (2)

This fall, Ballot Question 1 will threaten both public safety and the children of Massachusetts. This ballot initiative will create a new type of alcohol license that if approved, would increase the current number of licenses in the state by almost 3,000, more than doubling the current number of outlets. This would happen without our cities or towns receiving any additional resources to regulate and police these additional licenses.

This new type of license would allow grocery stores, convenience stores, certain drug stores, and even gas stations to carry wine without any increase in state oversight or local enforcement. Despite the numerous studies outlining the correlation between increased alcohol availability/outlet density and alcohol-related abuses and incidents, the national and international grocery and convenience store chains continue to push this initiative in the name of "convenience."

While the Massachusetts Food Association is presenting this as convenience for the consumer, with a person able to pick up a bottle of wine when they shop for dinner, what it actually represents is wholesale change to the Massachusetts liquor licensing system. Thousands of additional licenses will be issued based on population – one for every 5,000 residents. Local control will be significantly diminished. Wine will be sold at grocery stores and convenience stores throughout the state, not to mention in gas stations and big box retailers. The public must not be fooled, wine is NOT food! Wine is alcohol and we cannot become lax in the distribution of this sensitive product.

Convenience stores around our state routinely employ fifteen and sixteen year old kids who would now have easy access to alcoholic beverages, and would be put in the position of having to refuse to sell (or provide) alcohol to their friends and classmates. Additionally, the experts show again and again the direct correlation between the number of alcohol outlets and increases in drunk driving and underage drinking, not to mention other problems, including violence.

Massachusetts package store owners are integrated members of the community and consider the sale of alcohol to be a serious responsibility, as evidenced by their monitoring of stores and parking lots for public drinking and working closely with local law enforcement to restrict sales to minors. The threat of a violation leading to a temporary store closure offers an added incentive for vigilance. Wine sales will only represent a small segment of sales for the national grocery and convenience store chains, who will not be concerned with a potential violation that may temporarily close their wine section. This lack of accountability is evidenced in other states where grocery stores fail to stop underage buyers 25 – 30% of the time, almost double the rate of package stores.

Researcher Alex Wagenaar from the University of Minnesota studied seven states that allow wine sales in grocery stores. All of them saw a dramatic rise in alcohol consumption, up to 150%. Several other studies confirm this and have concluded that when there is an increase in the number of alcohol outlets there is an increase in the number of alcohol related car crashes, violent assaults, burglaries, underage drinking and college binge drinking. And, contrary to what the Food Association says, a majority of underage drinkers prefer a taste that is sweet and fruity, such as inexpensive bulk wine which would now be available in convenience stores and gas stations!

If we let Ballot Question 1 pass, allowing Wine to be sold in convenience stores, we all know it's just a matter of time before beer and liquor will also make their way into the grocery stores, gas stations, and convenience stores. As you can tell, I am very concerned about this irresponsible initiative and would greatly appreciate your support with a NO VOTE ON QUESTION 1. And please, tell all of your friends to VOTE NO ON QUESTION 1 as well. We owe it to our kids.

PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN

SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES

A question has been put on the Massachusetts November ballot that will dramatically change the way liquor is sold in the State. Question 1 if passed would more than DOUBLE the liquor licenses in MA, with NO funding for increased enforcement.

- Ahold, a foreign corporation headquartered in the Netherlands, which owns Stop & Shop is leading the charge to get the "wine in food stores" ballot question passed, along with other food stores. The question asks voters to allow over 2,800 new alcohol licenses to be issued by the state of Massachusetts. Initially these new licenses will be for wine only.
- The grocers will be spending millions of dollars talking about how "convenient" it will be to pick-up a bottle of wine with your groceries.
- What they won't tell you is that should this bill pass, in addition to grocery stores, virtually every convenience store, drug store, and even some gas stations will be able to sell alcohol. In fact, we've heard that one drug store chain has already prepared three hundred applications.
- One of the biggest risks to this proposed new system is underage drinking. The primary purpose behind Massachusetts' package store system is to ensure that the sale of liquor to the underage is strictly controlled. There is strict enforcement and tight penalties. Package store owners are committed to working with local law enforcement and the ABCC to prevent the sale of alcohol to the underage.
- Many convenience stores and drug stores employ fifteen and sixteen year olds. They would have easy access to alcoholic beverages, and would be put in the position of having to refuse to sell (or provide) alcohol to their classmates.
- Kids do drink wine, especially if it is more readily available than beer. A recent research study done by the Center for Addiction and Mental health found that 54% of students in grades 7 to 12 drink wine.
- Sting operations consistently show that grocery stores and convenience stores fail to stop underage buyers at a much higher rate than dedicated package stores. A recent sting operation performed in another state found that convenience stores failed to stop underage buyers 52% of the time while dedicated package stores failed 15% of the time.
- Oh, by the way, they also won't tell you about the research that shows the effects of increasing the availability of alcohol. So here it is... Research shows that when you increase the number of retail outlets selling alcohol, there is a significant increase in underage drinking, college binge drinking, crime and alcohol related car crashes.
- There are no provisions made to increase the budget for enforcement of double the number of licenses. This burden would be placed on local law enforcement, and existing ABCC (Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission) staff, both already straining from under funding. The ONLY financial benefit of the new system will be the profits that go to the supermarket and convenience store chains' owners.
- In addition, local businesses and their employees will be hurt. Many liquor stores will go out of business. The ones that survive will be forced to layoff employees. We estimate that 3,000 to 4,000 Massachusetts residents will lose their jobs.
- Maybe the current system isn't perfect, but for the most part it works. Please, when you go to the ballot box in November, protect your children and support the local businesses that have been supporting the community for so many years. VOTE NO on 1.

WEBSITE: WWW.WINEBALLOT.COM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. Is the Wine at Food Stores Initiative needed?

No, consumers in Massachusetts are fortunate to have over 2,200 locations throughout the state to purchase wine. Many stores carry thousands of different varieties of wine and have well educated staffs to assist shoppers in making their selection. As a matter of fact, there are about twice as many package stores as there are grocery stores. You might say it is actually more convenient to buy wine than groceries.

Q. How many new licenses would be created statewide?

Approximately 2,900 new off-premise licenses would be created. That's more than double the current number of off-premise licenses. An off-premise license authorizes alcohol to be sold through a retail store location as opposed to an on-premise license for a bar or restaurant. The Massachusetts Food Association is trying to trick Massachusetts voters by saying it's only a 10% increase in licenses. They are including the 7,500 licenses issued to bars and restaurants in their calculations. That's just plain shameful.

Q. Isn't it true that grocery stores can sell wine?

Yes, in fact many already do sell wine as well as beer and liquor. They just need to abide by the current laws that insure the safe distribution of alcohol.

Q. Then what's this all about?

This is about Ahold, a foreign corporation headquartered in the Netherlands, which owns Stop & Shop along with other food stores trying to increase their profits without regard for public safety. What the grocery store chains and big box stores want to do is drive local package stores out of business and monopolize the market.

Q. Do package stores have a monopoly on wine sales?

No. That's part of the misinformation the Food Association is using to confuse Massachusetts voters. If you think about it, it's kind of a ridiculous statement. A monopoly is created when a single company owns all or nearly all of the market for a given type of product or service. The current law does not allow any one individual or corporation to own more than three package stores. There are approximately 2,200 package stores in Massachusetts and they are owned by about 1,800 different individuals or companies. So how could there be a monopoly? Independent local business people predominantly own package stores. A near monopoly is what will be created if the initiative passes. The three-license limit would no longer apply. A few large grocery and convenience store chains would control the market each owning several hundred licenses.

Q. Will the initiative lead to lower prices or an increase in selection?

No, that's another piece of misinformation the Food Association is feeding the public. Prices may actually increase over time and your choice of products will be greatly reduced. Just walk into any grocery store or convenience store that sells alcohol today. The selection is very limited and their prices are generally higher than package stores. If the Food Association is successful in their efforts we'll end up with higher prices and a poorer selection of products. It's called zone pricing which always leads to higher prices.

Q. Will convenience stores be able to get these new licenses?

Yes, actually the majority or close to 2,000 of these licenses would go to convenience stores, drug stores and even some gas stations. According to the Food Association only

about one-third will go to supermarkets. All any of these stores need to do is carry certain types of grocery items. Most of these stores already qualify.

Q. Will this lead to increases in underage drinking?

Yes, for a couple of reasons. First of all, these types of stores employ fifteen and sixteen year olds who will now have easy access to alcohol and be responsible for policing their classmates. Secondly, numerous sting operations done throughout the country prove that grocery stores and convenience stores fail to stop underage buyers at a much higher rate than dedicated package stores. In fact, in a recent sting operation, convenience stores failed to stop underage buyers 52% of the time versus 15% for dedicated package stores. Those kinds of results are typical. Grocery stores and convenience stores just don't have the same incentive as package stores to stop underage buyers. If a package store is caught their whole store is closed down whereas a convenience or grocery store would just have to close down an aisle.

Q. Are there other safety issues I should be concerned with?

Yes. There is a large body of research which shows that increasing the number of retail outlets selling alcohol dramatically increases; consumption, alcohol related car crashes, violent crimes, underage drinking and college binge drinking. For more information go to www.wineballot.com and click on research.

Q. Do kids drink wine?

Any of us could probably answer that question on our own. Twenty-five years ago Boones Farm Apple wine was a favorite drink of many kids. Today they are drinking box wines, jug wines, and fruit infused wines like Wild Vines and Arbor Mist. Kids aren't picky. They will drink whatever is most convenient. The proof is in the research. A recent study shows that 54% of kids in grade seven through twelve drink wine. Of course, the Food Association knows this, and is shamefully trying to hide this information from voters. They have no problem sacrificing the safety of our children to increase their profits.

Q. Will local licensing authorities have control over issuing these licenses?

Technically yes, but in reality they will have no control. If a store qualifies, and the local licensing authority turns them down, lawsuits will arise and the city or town will be forced to issue the license.

Q. Who will pay for the costs associated with policing these new licenses?

You will if you are a taxpayer in Massachusetts. The cost to the state for policing these new licenses and for dealing with the increases in drunk driving, underage drinking, and crime could top one hundred million dollars. The money generated through new licenses will be about three million dollars. The difference eventually will have to be covered through tax increases.