

To: The Members of the House Commerce & Economic Development Committee

From: Mike Braxmeyer, Owner
Williams Brothers Supermarket

Date: February 7, 2012

I would like to express my appreciation for the chance to submit this letter in support of modernizing Kansas' liquor laws. I own of Williams Brothers Supermarket in Atwood, Kansas. My store sits 14 miles from Nebraska and 50 miles from Colorado.

I might start out by mentioning that grocery stores are perhaps one of the most regulated industries in the state and that we probably collect more sales tax than most other industries. There are fees, annual licenses, permits and certifications to sell various items that we offer in our stores. The industry is also one of the most competitive, with very slim profit margins. So, we have to compete 24 hours a day to keep our doors open. Because my store is so close to the Nebraska border, I have to compete with not only other Kansas businesses, large and small, but also with retailers in other states with more modern laws. And, our state laws don't give me a "leg up" in competing with any of these retailers.

That's why I find it hard to understand why the government chooses to protect small liquor stores at the expense of other retailers. The government doesn't offer that same protection to small rural grocery stores—which in my estimation are extremely important to the communities we serve. Business is about surviving in a marketplace based on competition and consumer demand. And, every small business should operate under the same set of rules.

Unfortunately, many small-town grocers are struggling, and many are going out of business. Atwood used to have four grocery stores. Now, we are down to just one. In nearby Goodland, there were two, now there is one. The same goes for Oberlin.

I understand that to a large degree the market and the consumers decide who survives and who doesn't. But, it's tough to see my counterparts losing their stores, especially when I believe part of the reason is because current liquor laws have stacked the deck against them.

By passing modernized liquor laws, the state will be leveling the playing field for all small retailers. And, it will be giving rural grocers a fighting chance for survival. It will also give customers the choice of where they buy alcoholic beverages. Many would like buy be able to buy wine to go with their dinner purchases, and they'd like to be able to do it in the clean, friendly, safe environment we provide. In addition, I know my customers would trust me to not sell alcohol to their kids. After all, many grocers are already complying with the same underage sale regulations that liquor stores must adhere to.

As a small-town, local grocery store owner, I urge you to level the playing field among small retailers by supporting updating Kansas liquor laws—for the sake of our industry and specifically for the small businesses we operate.

Thank you for your consideration.

Mike Braxmeyer, owner
Williams Brothers Supermarket
Atwood, Kansas

House Commerce & Economic Development

Date: 02/07/12

Attachment #: 9