Bill# 967 – Package Stores and Fee Based Wine Tastings and Classes

Written Testimony by Gregory Nemergut, Owner, West Side Wines and Spirits, West Hartford, CT

The model of a liquor store (off-premise or package store permittee) is progressively changing and is becoming more diverse. This change is being largely driven by consumer trends in wine, both nationally and locally, in the form of demand for higher quality and more varied types of wine. The U.S. wine market has grown for 14 consecutive years increasing 66% by volume from 1993 to 2007. Furthermore, wine has a strong positive image with consumers and many positive reports on moderate wine consumption and health contribute to this favorable image. (Wine Institute; Jon Fredrikson, Gomberg, Fredrikson & Associates, 2008) A nationwide Harris Poll conducted in December 2008 finds that "almost 6 in 10 Americans (58%) are wine buyers." (Harris Interactive, 2/09).

Package store permittees, most of whom are individually-owned small businesses, need to be able to develop business strategies and initiatives to respond to these trends in consumer demand and be competitive in a larger market. A large part of this response entails business model fundamentals: investing in a knowledgeable wine staff, creating an inviting environment in which to shop, and selecting and stocking a wide range of wines to offer. Another key part of this response is consumer education. Because of the wide range of wine regions, types and styles, as well as Mother Nature's impact from year to year, education becomes an important part of understanding and navigating the diverse landscape of the wine world. Only so much information can be imparted at the time of sale and therefore a more comprehensive level can only be gained through structured wine education. Currently we provide a limited and informal level of wine information and education at our in-store tastings. (Exhibit 1) Even so, and most importantly, it is customers who are asking for more structured wine education. At West Side Wines & Spirits, it is the number one request from our customer base and is supported by the fact that 74% of the 1,838 people who have signed up for our wine newsletter indicate interest in formal wine education.(Exhibit 2)

Because of this consumer-driven demand, and from conversations with wine retailers from Fairfield County to New London County, we strongly urge the committee to recommend adding fee-based wine education to an off-premise liquor permit. I envision that this wine education would be provided through formal, structured classes. A class would be defined as a period of instruction to provide education in the origins, history, culture, technical aspects and critical appreciation of wine led by store staff, a trade expert or winemaker. Instruction would involve a verbal presentation, which could include visual media and supporting handouts and other class materials, as well as wine tasting in support of the educational objectives of the class.(Exhibit 3) The supporting wine tasting would be conducted under guidelines and requirements similar to those already in place for " in-store" wine tastings, i.e., the number of wines being tasted and the amount of wine poured for tasting purposes are limited. The class structure and purpose would also be also similar to wine education that has been offered by adult/continuing education programs in various towns throughout Connecticut. The duration of the class would be dependent upon the topic being presented, yet any given class would generally last from 45 minutes to 90 minutes. Some topics would warrant more than a single class. Classes would be conducted during established business hours and would not require any extension of opening. Class fees would depend on the duration of instruction, i.e. a single session class versus a multiple session class. Just as fees for cooking classes for the public vary so would fees for wine education. Finally, the fee charged is reimbursement for the investment in developing and organizing the class, the instructional materials (handouts and other supporting literature) provided and wines tasted, as well as to qualify the level of interest of those people taking the class.

In closing, allowing off-premise permittees to provide fee-based education to customers not only responds to consumer-driven interest and demand in a structured and regulated manner, it also fosters a smarter, more aware wine consumer. I believe that wine education through small businesses that are committed to and closest to their customers and the wines they offer is, and should be, a key initiative in promoting the enlightened, moderate and responsible consumption of wine as part of a larger, healthful lifestyle.

West Side Wines and Spirits

Exhibit 1

Join us for Saturday afternoon wine tastings, 2 to 6:30 p.m.

This Saturday, February 14

Sparkling

Lucien Albrecht Crémant d'Alsace Brut Rosé

Cremant d'Alsace is probably France's most traditional yet least known quality sparkling wine. Made by the Champagne method, it is traditionally a blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris. Dry with fine bubbles, it has full flavors, a light texture and a beautiful onion skin/salmon color. In the rosé version, the grape is only Pinot Noir and the result is a sparkler with a delicate thread of berry fruit. These are simply scrumptious bubbles.

Reg. $19.99 Special $17.99

White

Stefano Massone Gavi, "Masera", 2007

While the Piedmont is best known for its long-lived reds, Barolo and Barbaresco, Gavi is its ethereal and delicate white. Made from 100% Cortese from a single vineyard, this delicious white is both soft and crisp. With a pleasant minerality, this straw-yellow wine features notes of apple and pear and a lovely, lingering, refreshing finish.

Reg. $14.99 Special $13.49

Reds

Cairnbrae Pinot Noir, Marlborough, 2007

Just as New Zealand has rearranged the world map of Sauvignon Blanc, this land of pristine air and water is making waves with Pinot Noir. New Zealand is evolving its own style of Pinot Noir that's neither the black-cherry-cola-spice of California nor the taut, earthy, precise style of Burgundy. Marlborough is a large winegrowing area to say the least and Cairnbrae, a family-owned and -operated winery, is located in the Rapaura district with neighbors such as Cloudy Bay and Stoneleigh. Welcome to the Kiwi style.

Reg. $16.99 Special $15.29

Dashe Zinfandel, "l'Enfant Terrible," 2007

It wouldn't be a stretch to translate the French as "the wild child" and, boy, is this kid fun. This is a wine unlike any other that Dashe Cellars has ever produced: Complex, lower in alcohol, unfined and unfiltered, fermented using native yeasts found on the grapes, organically grown and harvested early at a comparatively low sugar level for Zinfandel. Mike Dashe purchased all of the fruit from Guinness McFadden's hillside Zinfandel vineyard in Potter Valley (Mendocino County). Dashe's objective was to make a Zin that is not only food friendly, but virtually "hands-off" in the winery. He wanted to keep the fruit as pure and distinctive as possible, reflecting the character of the vineyard. To help achieve this, Dashe fermented in a stainless steel tank and intentionally kept this wine away from heavy oak influences by aging in a huge 900 gallon oak cask to keep the fresh fruit while still possessing a "barrel-aged" character. Compared to the high-alcohol bruisers being made, this "wild child" of Zin is as sprightly and unaffected as you'll ever find.

Reg. $26.99 Special $23.99

Special pricing applies the day of the tasting only

10 Raymond Road, West Hartford, 860-233-1241, staff@westsidewines.com

Exhibit 2

Yes, I am interested in receiving a newsletter and announcements about special events, tastings, wine classes and wine dinners.

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Phone: _____

E-Mail: _____

(*Please* print legibly)

Special Interests?

- ☐ Wine Classes
- ☐ Wine Dinners
- ☐ Custom Tastings
- ☐ Gift Registry
- ☐ California Cabs
- ☐ Spanish Reds
- ☐ Pinot Noir
- ☐ Australian Shiraz
- ☐ Italian Reds
- ☐ Chardonnay
- ☐ Single Malt Scotch
- ☐ Other_____

_____

Exhibit 3

Wine 101: Intro to Wine and Wine Tasting

Week 1- Basic components of wine (FASTA)
White Wine Basics
2- Red Wine Basics
3- Sparkling Wine Basics
Dessert and Fortified Wine Basics

Week 1

Basic components of wine (FASTA):
Fruit
Acid
Sweetness
Tannins
Alcohol

How to taste-the 3 steps
Sight
Smell
Taste

White Wine Basics

Key White Wine Varieties:
Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling (or Pinot Gris)

Varietal Information:
Growing regions, varietal characteristics, vinification methods

Tasting:
Sauvignon Blanc- Loire, New Zealand, Bordeaux blanc
Riesling- Germany (Mosel), Alsace, US/Australia
Chardonnay- Burgundy, US, Argentina
Pinot Gris- Italy, Alsace, Oregon

Week 2 Red Wine Basics

Key Red Wine Varieties:
Cabernet Sauvignon- California, Bordeaux, South America
Merlot- California, Bordeaux, South America
Pinot Noir- California, Oregon, Burgundy
Syrah- Rhone, Australia

Week 3 Sparkling Wine Basics

What is Sparkling Wine? How is it made?

-the difference between sparkling wine and Champagne
-production methods
-brut, extra dry, demi-sec

Key types: Champagne
Prosecco

Sparkling Wine and Food

Dessert and Fortified Wines

Dessert Wines- late harvest, botrytis cinerea, key regions
Taste: sauternes

Fortified Wines- definitions, regions, methods

Port- types, taste (tawny 10/20, vintage character, LBV)

The Components of Wine - FASTA

Fruit- Descriptor for a wine that has a characteristic flavor and smell of fresh fruit. Besides grapes, this fruity characteristic can be reminiscent of everything from apples to blackberries to raspberries; it can even resemble cooked fruit. Wines that are high in fruit generally have a FRESH quality and distinctive CHARACTER.

Acidity- Acidity occurs naturally during the growing of grapes and as part of the FERMENTATION process. Wines show lower levels of acid when there are hot growing seasons or when the grapes come from hotter VITICULTURAL regions. Conversely, cooler regions or cooler growing seasons produce wines with higher acid levels. In the proper proportion, acids are a desirable trait and give the wine CHARACTER, much as a dash of vinegar or lemon juice heightens the flavor of many foods. Too much acid leaves a sharp, tart taste in the mouth, while too little makes wine seem flat and lifeless. The three predominant acids in wine are **tartaric**, **malic**, and **citric**, all of which are intrinsic to the grape. Tartaric acid is the principal acid in grapes and is a component that promotes a crisp flavor and graceful AGING in wine. A moderate amount of a wine's acid comes from malic acid, which contributes fruitiness, and a small amount comes from citric acid. Wine also contains minute to trace amounts of other acids, which are produced during fermentation, including: **acetic**, **butyric**, **capric**, **caproic**, **caprylic**, **carbonic** (in SPARKLING WINES), **formic**, **lactic**, **lauric**, **propionic**, and **succinic**. The least desirable acid in wine is **acetic acid**, which, when present in more than a nominal amount, gives wine a sour or vinegary aspect. **Volatile acids** (such as acetic and butyric) are those that can be altered-for instance, they can evaporate. **Fixed acids** are fruit acids (such as malic and tartaric) that are organic to the grape. **Total acidity**, also called *titratable acidity*, is the sum of the fixed and volatile acids, which is determined by a chemical process called **titration**. In the United States the total acidity is usually expressed in terms of tartaric acid, even though the other acids are measured. Total acidity is expressed either as a percentage or as grams per liter. The proper acid level of a wine varies, with sweeter wines generally requiring somewhat higher levels to retain the proper BALANCE. Some labels make note of a wine's acidity. For dry TABLE WINE the acceptable range is usually 0.6 to 0.75 percent; for sweet wine it's 0.7 to 0.85 percent. In some areas (usually warm growing regions where acidity is lower) like California, natural grape acids can legally be added to wine to increase the acidity. This acid adjustment process is called **acidulation**. In a well-made wine, acidity will not be noticeable.

Sweetness- Sweetness is detected on the very tip of the tongue and, in wine, comes from RESIDUAL SUGAR or, occasionally, from GLYCEROL, a by-product of FERMENTATION. The sugar may be intrinsic (from the grapes) or supplemental (as by adding GRAPE CONCENTRATE) or both. Some fine sweet wines (such as BEERENAUSLESE) are made from grapes that have been left on

the vine until they're so overripe that the fruit is sugar-laden and full of rich, concentrated flavors. The juice from such grapes contains more sugar than can be fermented out. Whether or not sweetness in a wine is pleasant or cloying depends on the balance between ACID and sugar. Though the term *sweet* generally applies to the sense of taste, certain components-such as oakiness, which contributes a sweet vanilla essence, or intense fruitiness-can give wine a seemingly sweet smell. Winetasters may therefore use the term *sweet* for both flavor and BOUQUET.

Tannins- Any of a group of astringent substances found in the seeds, skins, and stems of grapes, as well as in oak barrels, particularly new ones. Tannins are part of a grouping technically called PHENOLIC COMPOUNDS. They are important in the production of good red wines because they provide flavor, STRUCTURE, and TEXTURE and, because of their antioxidant traits, contribute to long and graceful AGING. Tannins often give young wines a noticeable astringency, a quality that diminishes as the wine ages, mellows, and develops character. Wines with noticeable tannins are referred to as *tannic.* Tannins are detectable by a dry, sometimes puckery, sensation in the mouth and back of the throat.

Alcohol- Alcohol is the intoxicating element produced by the yeast FERMENTATION of certain carbohydrates-the sugar in fruit, in the instance of wine. If a wine is fully fermented, from 40 to 45 percent of the grapes' sugar content is converted into carbon dioxide and from 55 to 60 percent is converted into **ethyl alcohol** (the only alcohol suitable for drinking). Therefore, a wine whose grapes were picked at 23° BRIX will end up with 12.6 to 13.8 percent alcohol if VINIFIED completely DRY. Ethyl alcohol, also known as *ethanol,* lends little if any flavor to wine but must be present in the right proportion to give wine a desirable BALANCE. Wine with a low alcohol level might be too sweet because not enough of the grape's sugar was converted. This results in RESIDUAL SUGAR, an undesirable trait in some wines. Wines with excessive alcohol are characterized by a burning sensation in the mouth and are, in fact, referred to as HOT. Wines with full, concentrated fruit flavors can withstand higher alcohol levels without becoming hot; more delicate wines don't fare as well. The United States requires that **alcohol by volume** information be included on wine labels. For TABLE WINE, the United States requires a minimum alcohol level of 7 percent and a maximum of 14 percent. The label variance can be up to 1.5 percent. For example, a wine stating "Alcohol 12.5% By Volume" can legally range anywhere from 11 to 14 percent. However, wines cannot exceed the upper or lower limit. The alcohol-by-volume range for SHERRIES is 17 to 20 percent; for PORTS it's 18 to 20 percent. The label variance for both of these FORTIFIED wines is 1 percent.