



# WINE AND SPIRITS WHOLESALERS OF CONNECTICUT, INC.

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TESTIMONY OF  
WINE AND SPIRITS WHOLESALERS OF CONNECTICUT  
before the  
Committee on Transportation

Concerning: **S.B. No. 697 An Act Requiring The Suspension Of The Motor Vehicle Operator's License Of A Minor Who Purchases Or Attempts To Purchase Alcohol.**

**H.B. No. 5601 An Act Providing For Increased Awareness Of The Physiological Effects Of Underage Drinking.**

**H.B. No. 6137 An Act Implementing A National Alcohol Voluntary Exclusion List.**

The members of the WSWC support the objectives of **S.B. No. 697 An Act Requiring The Suspension Of The Motor Vehicle Operator's License Of A Minor Who Purchases Or Attempts To Purchase Alcohol**; however, they believe that the objective of the bill—that is to deter underage drinking can be further advanced through strengthening the bill. The proposed bill, which makes only some minor changes to the current version of C.G.S. § 14-111e, requires the suspension of the motor vehicle license, for differing periods of time, of a person under the age of 21 who has been convicted of a violation of C.G.S. §§ 30-88a or 30-89. The WSWC believes that that C.G.S. § 14-111e should be strengthened by permitting the administrative revocation of an individual's license who violates either C.G.S. § 30-88a or 30-89. The requirement that there be a criminal conviction before the suspension of an individual's driving privileges all too often leads no real penalty being imposed on the person, who is often an adult over the age of 18 but under the age of 21, who purchases or attempts to purchase alcohol through the use of false identification. Whether it is through the use of a pre-trial diversionary programs such as Accelerated Rehabilitation or the Youthful Offender Program or prosecutorial discretion, often no criminal conviction ensues from the violation of C.G.S. §§ 30-88a or 30-89 and, thus the license suspension contemplated by C.G.S. § 14-111e is not imposed. On the other hand the permittee who was deceived by this person, again often an adult, into making the sale of beverage alcohol will be required to close his or her business for a number of days and to pay a fine, often in the thousands of dollars. Establishing a program where by an adult's license would be suspended through the administrative per se hearing process administered by the Department of Motor Vehicle would act as a significant deterrent to prevent adults from falsifying there age in attempting to purchase beverage alcohol.

The members of the WSWC are committed to reducing underage drinking and to that end have established the WSWC's Community Relations Program whose goal it is to tackle underage drinking and drunk driving through unique grass roots community based programs. One of the initiatives implemented by the WSWC was a PSA Contest where contestants were called upon to write film and produce a 30 second television spot encouraging parents of young child to talk to their children about the dangers of drinking. The proposed requirements of **H.B. No. 5601 An Act Providing For Increased Awareness Of The Physiological Effects Of Underage Drinking** are, similarly inline with what the WSWC and others such as DMAS, the Governor's Prevention Partnership and local community health agencies are already doing. What is not specified in the bill, however, is what specific information, either by topic or depth in what is a complex and developing field, is to be conveyed to either the parents or youths. There are no safe guards, regulatory structure or oversight proposed in the bill to ensure that the information which is being conveyed is correct, accurate up to date and based upon the best scientific information. Also, one must be cognizant of the fact that driving instructors are experts in driving and not experts in the health effects of alcohol, nor should we expect them to be. Without any oversight and structure, there is the real risk, that

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in an attempt to provide some of the information, incorrect or incomplete information might be given. For this reason, the WSWC suggests that while driver education classes might be an excellent contact point at which to reach youth and their parents, driving instructors may not be the best suited to impart this important information.

The members of the WSWC recognize the laudable objectives of **H.B. No. 6137 An Act Implementing A National Alcohol Voluntary Exclusion List** but suggest that the proposal is on a practical level unworkable. While the theory of the bill may initially seem simple, its application would in fact be costly and difficult to implement. Picture if you will, going to dinner with a group of friends. A bottle of wine is ordered for the table. Before the bottle of wine could be brought to the wait staff or other restaurant personnel would have to collect each person's license at the table and then through technology, that has not yet been developed, determine whether or not that person has registered their name on a list that, as of this date, has not yet been constructed. Think about the busy bar or tavern owner. Each time a bartender passes an alcoholic beverage over the counter to a customer, they would have ask for the person's driver license and then verify whether the person had registered their name. It would also require that each person who wanted a drink to personally ask for it from the bartender and have their license checked against the list. When one thinks about situations such as this it become obvious the practical implications of implanting such legislation are significant. Additionally, many retail permittees, (restaurants, bars and package stores) lack the technology and/or the capital to implement this type of a program. The WSWC suggests that until there is a practical workable means to allow permittees to comply with the proposed requirements of this bill that consideration of this measure should be delayed.

*Who Are The Members of the WSWC?* The members of the Wine and Spirits Wholesalers of Connecticut are a key link in the 3-Tier System which controls the distribution of beverage alcohol in this country. They purchase beverage alcohol from suppliers and manufacturers and then market and sell those products to licensed retailers – restaurants and package stores. The members of the WSWC:

- are licensed and regulated by the state of Connecticut and the federal government;
- are responsible to insure that the wines and spirits brought in to the state by manufacturers and importers are sold and distributed only to licensed retailers (package stores and restaurant);
- pay to the state in excess of \$35 million dollars in state excise taxes;
- assist the Department of Revenue Services in the collection of Sales and Use Taxes, in excess of \$114 Million Dollars annually;
- provide in excess of 1,400 direct jobs to Connecticut residents; and
- contribute in excess of \$150 million dollars in direct and in direct benefits to the state's economy.<sup>1</sup>

The members of the WSWC are committed to ensuring that the best possible safeguards to prevent the sale of beverage alcohol to minors are in place and adults of legal drinking age consume beverage alcohol responsibly, while at the same time providing an efficient method of distribution which provides access to a wide variety of quality wine and spirits from all over the world.

Respectfully submitted,



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<sup>1</sup> Figures based upon FY 06-07