



Testimony of Stan Sorkin, Connecticut Food Association

In support of SB204: An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Program Review and Investigations Committee Concerning the Sale of Alcoholic Beverages on Sunday

Before the Program Review & Investigations Committee

March 8, 2010

Good afternoon Chairman Kissel, Chairman Mushinsky, and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. My name is Stan Sorkin and I am the President of the Connecticut Food Association. Our Association provides policy advice, research, legislative and regulatory services to the grocery industry in the state. Our membership ranges from single store independent operators to large chain stores.

I am here today to voice the Connecticut Food Association's strong support for Senate Bill 204 to end the state's antiquated blue law ban on the Sunday sale of alcoholic beverages at our neighborhood grocery and package stores.

Connecticut is one of only three states in the entire country, and the only state in the Northeast that still prohibits the Sunday sale of alcoholic beverages at retail establishments. This ban is highly inconvenient for Connecticut's consumers and is also costing our stores and our state lost business and tax revenue. This is particularly true for our member stores near the border of neighboring states that have eliminated this blue law prohibition.

Connecticut's neighborhood grocery stores have safely and responsibly sold beer to our customers for years. Our member stores are already open seven days a week, yet they can only sell beer Monday through Saturday. This means lost sales and less convenience for our customers, particularly as Sunday has become one of the two most popular shopping days of the week.

Lifting the current ban will mean more sales for our grocery stores, which will, in turn, mean more hours for store employees and new jobs. Increased sales will also create new sales tax revenue, new excise tax revenue, and additional unclaimed deposit escheat revenue for the state. According to a recent Program Review and Investigations Committee report, Connecticut could see an increase of up to \$8 million in new revenue if the Sunday alcohol sales prohibition were repealed. We need this revenue to help close our state's budget deficit and to spare important social programs from deep budget cuts.

The retail industry is a seven day a week business. The retail industry is all about providing consumers with more choice and convenience. Ending Connecticut's outdated ban on Sunday alcohol sales will do just that. At the same time, there is absolutely nothing in this legislation that would prohibit package store owners from remaining closed on Sunday if they so choose or closing on a different weekday. Moreover, it allows package goods and grocery stores located near the borders to compete on an even playing field for sales seven days a week.

As Edward Peter Stringham, Visiting Associate Professor of American Business and Economic Enterprise at Trinity College, wrote on Feb 27, 2010 in a Hartford Courant Your View Op-Ed piece titled "Not Just Booze Taxes Lost to Sunday Ban" and I quote,

"Right now, Connecticut likely loses millions in state tax revenue every year from residents crossing into New York, Massachusetts and Rhode Island to buy alcohol on Sundays. Ending the massively inconvenient restriction would keep Connecticut residents shopping in-state instead of out of state. It's also important to note that when customers cross the border to pick up tequila for Sunday night margaritas or beer for the football game, they're also buying gas, grabbing lunch or even shopping at the mall. Connecticut loses out on all that peripheral revenue as well.

Keeping these customers in Connecticut on Sundays means more tax revenue for the state. Every time a customer buys alcohol in Connecticut instead of another state, the treasury collects a variety of taxes and fees. In fact, the only people who should be upset about Connecticut allowing Sunday sales are the package store owners on the borders in New York, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Further, Sunday is the second busiest retail shopping day of the week. By denying Sunday shoppers the opportunity to buy a particular item, the state arbitrarily prevents potential in-state customers from purchasing products that are available every other day. Believe it or not, there are a fair amount of people in Connecticut who have only Sundays available for shopping trips — I being one of them.

Ultimately, the decision to offer Sunday sales should be just another business matter such as how to price items, which products to stock and what color to paint the walls. It is, after all, a store owner's choice whether or not to open, if Sunday liquor sales were to be allowed. Some store owners, those not in highly trafficked areas, will choose to remain closed. Store owners along the border will no doubt open to compete with neighboring businesses.

In short, Sunday sales are simply another tool for liquor store owners to use at their discretion. Modern entrepreneurs flourish when given the flexibility to better compete — and that certainly is to the benefit of Connecticut's economy."

In conclusion, raising state revenue at the same time you are increasing retail sales is good for the economy and good for Connecticut. It is certainly far better than another tax increase.

For all of these reasons, I urge you to support Senate Bill 204 and the lifting of Connecticut's outdated blue law ban on the Sunday sale of alcoholic beverages.