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February 8, 2011

Senate Bill 864

I am Barbara Koren, a resident of Barkhamsted and for the past 22 years a Buyer and Marketing Manager in the convenience retail sector. I work for Mercury Fuel out of Waterbury which operators 23, soon to be 24 convenience / gas locations throughout Connecticut. We employ approximately 200 people. Sarah Devino, sitting next to me today, is a third generation family member joining the company. She'll be the third one from this generation to come on board and Grandma is still in the office every day.

We are here today to ask for your support for Senate Bill 864 an act that would allow convenience stores w/ gas to sell the #3 product found in convenience stores throughout the country, beer. The convenience retailers of Connecticut have been precluded from selling a product that for our peers in other states is a key to remaining viable and profitable.

Each year this bill and others that request changes to the liquor laws of Connecticut keep coming up. Public hearings are held, sides are taken and no progress is made. The time for action is this year. The difficult economy has left all, including the state of Connecticut, reeling. Preventing the retailers in Connecticut from making attempts to balance their books, increase sales, bring competition to the market place does nothing to solve the economic woes of our state and will continue to leave us all further behind.

I had the privilege this past year of working on the Sustinet Tobacco Task Force. While the main aim of the task force was suggestions on how to lower the smoking rates in CT the task force also looked at the economic impact of less tobacco sales in the state. Tobacco is the #1 product sold inside convenience stores. Recommendation #19 of this task force was "To ensure a healthy retail environment with ample competition for Connecticut citizens' regulations that prevent retailers from expanding into other products to make up for the loss in tobacco revenue need to be changed." Sales in cigarettes are down double digits. The time for action on bills like 864 is now.

Times have changed. The needs of our citizens have changed. Some Connecticut laws have prevented retailers from responding and meeting these changing needs. In Connecticut we need to make sure that our consumers have choices and that our retailers have the opportunity to make those sales happen.

Let me tell you a story. My husband is currently working 10 hours a day, 6 days a week. On Super Bowl Sunday we discovered we had no beer in the house. A "quick" 1 hour trip to Massachusetts took care of that. Need I say more?

I'm here today because when its time for Sarah to take over running Mercury Fuel I want to make sure she has every chance possible to achieve success, to take care of her 200+ employees and her countless customers. It is time to stop supporting laws intended to protect a single retail sector and time to start enacting laws that encourage all of our retailers through hard work, imagination, creativity and competition to offer the citizens of Connecticut great choices and the convenience they so need in today's hectic world.

Please don't let this opportunity pass Connecticut by. Support Senate Bill 864 and others like it that have the potential to increase overall sales in our state. Don't make me have to drive to Massachusetts again, please.