

15

Testimony Submitted By:
Cathy Barber, President NECSA
RE: S.B. No. 864 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING GROCERY STORE BEER PERMITS
General Law Committee
February 8, 2011

Co-Chairs and Committee Members, thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of the Connecticut Chapter of the New England Convenience Store Association (NECSA) in support of SB 864. My name is Cathy Barber and I am the President of NECSA and employed as a Sales Manager for the L.E. Belcher Company. NECSA's Connecticut Chapter represents hundreds of convenience stores across the state and our membership consists of independent operators as well as chain stores.

NECSA members who are convenience store retailers and I are asking you to vote in favor of S.B. No. 864; AN ACT CONCERNING GROCERY STORE BEER PERMITS.

Under Connecticut law unless a retail location is defined as "primarily a grocery store" the establishment is not allowed to obtain the necessary regulatory permit. Specifically, NECSA members believes that consumers would have better access to making these purchases and that there would be a positive revenue impact to convenience stores and that the state of Connecticut through the expansion of beer sales by permitting convenience stores including those that sell fuel.

Recently, NECSA's Connecticut Chapter has commissioned a study that is being conducted regarding expanding grocery beer permits to convenience stores. In particular, other neighboring states including Massachusetts allow convenience stores to sell beer and Connecticut has the lowest per capita consumption of beer in New England. Actually, consumption of beer in Connecticut is lower than 48 other states. Our study is anticipated to be finalized this month so that we may provide it for consideration soon.

What we can tell you now is that currently Connecticut's General Statutes provide requirements to obtain a grocery store beer permit. Upon applying for a permit the applicant retailer must supply the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP) with sales data. The DCP appears to consider convenience store applicants almost all of whom sell non-food items and or those that also sell fuel to not to be eligible for grocery store beer permits. Convenience store owners and operators see this preclusion from a permit to sell beer as unfair to Connecticut consumers and small businesses that are treated differently than other similarly situated small businesses because of the interpretation of an antiquated law. Connecticut convenience store operators sell many food items. We believe that there are many convenience stores that are denied a permit that likely sell significantly larger amounts of "groceries" than many small grocery corner stores that do not sell gasoline.

It appears based upon the state law, that the Connecticut consumer is artificially limited in choice because the grocery beer permit law was adopted 40 years ago and has not been updated to reflect the reality of the food/convenience store market today.

Connecticut convenience stores are the state's valuable business partners in many aspects including selling Connecticut's Lottery tickets. We believe the state will also benefit from tax revenues from additional beer sales by passing this bill. Plus, we believe beer customers may likely buy other products at our stores resulting in additional potential revenues for the state, too.

Another current reality is that Connecticut rates 49th out of 50 states in beer consumption per capita and Utah is the only state that consumes less beer per capita according to the Beer Institute. Connecticut is already losing revenue by not allowing convenience stores to sell beer. Our customers are precluded from access to these purchases and our stores are losing potential sales during these difficult economic times.

There are many NECSA convenience store members who are here to testify before you today and they will include more specific details about the effect passage of this bill will like have and we are all here to ask for your support of our industry and customers. For these many reasons, NECSA and its members ask you to pass SB 864. Thank you very much for your consideration of our testimony.

Diana O'Donoghue, Esq.
Executive Director
New England Convenience Store Association
1044 Central Street, Suite 203, Stoughton, MA 02072
Ph: (781) 297-9600, ext. 3
Fax (781) 297-9601
Toll Free (866) 882-9090
www.necsa.net

NECSA's Upcoming Member Events

NECSA's "Top to Top Meetings" and Store Operator Awards Reception - April 26, 2011

DCU Center, Worcester, MA

NECSA's Trade Show, "Cooking Up The Profits!" - April 27, 2011

10:00 am – 4:00 pm, DCU Center, Worcester, MA

NECSA Human Resources & Store Operations Share Groups' Meetings- May 19, 2011

10:00 am – 1:30 pm, NECSA's Office, Stoughton, MA

NECSA's Golf Tournament - June 15, 2011
Juniper Hills, Northborough, MA