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Testimony in support of HB 5349

Senator Leone, Representative Baram, Senator Witkos and Representative Carter, I am in strong support of HB 5349 Establishing a Wine and Beer permit for Cheese Stores. This bill would level the playing field for small cheese shops like mine. Recently CT voted changes in the liquor laws to allow wine and liquor shops to sell cheese and "related" food in their stores. This has had an impact on small cheese shops like mine.

There are several reasons I am asking for your support but the primary reason is to level the playing field. Our business is a young one and everyday we struggle to accomplish our goals of a profitable, job creating, self-sufficient entity that contributes not only to our family's sustainability but to our greater community. Since we opened five years ago Whole Foods has opened, Fairway Market has opened and now many wine & liquor shops are offering their customers cheese due to recent changes in the laws. Large cheese suppliers from out of State are providing kiosks of cheese at an alarming rate. This constant onslaught of competition makes our future unclear.

I always felt confident that our business would be able to grow and expand but as things stand now we have to fight hard just to keep our market share. If we were allowed the same rights as the wine and liquor shops it would go a long way to helping us expand *our* revenue sources just like the wine & liquor shops have. I believe you can't allow one group this revenue stream without allowing another. Quite frankly they should have considered other businesses like mine when they decided to grant wine shops this right. We want the same consideration.

We recently opened a shop in Greenwich and my Greenwich store would be prime to allow limited amounts of wine and craft beer to be matched with our cheese. We aren't looking to sell a full selection, just a limited amount specifically matched to our cheese.

I have visited many cheese shops like mine all over the country and it is **very** common for them to offer to their customers a well-edited, limited selection of fine wine and craft beers. Again, we are not interested in running a liquor store, our focus is cheese & specialty foods, but to have the option to pair up a nice bottle of wine or a new Connecticut Craft beer would be beneficial to our bottom line and help us have a fighting chance to preserve our share of the market.

Fair is fair right?

Thank you for your support and feel free to contact me with any questions.