

March 6, 2018

Testimony in front of General Law Committee

HB 5036 – “An Act Promoting Craft Breweries and Distilleries and Price Fairness”

Good afternoon, Chairman D’Agostino, Chairman Leone, Chairman Witkos, Members of the General Law Committee. My name is Bill Coleman. I am the Deputy Director of the City of Bridgeport’s Office of Planning and Economic Development.

I’m here today to offer testimony in opposition to House Bill 5036, “An Act Promoting Craft Breweries and Distilleries and Price Fairness” in that the bill does not do enough to live up to its name and promote Craft Distilleries. We would like to see this Committee support legislation that would put craft distilleries on par with brew pubs allowing distillers to sell and serve where they make, not by the ounce or two ounces proposed in this bill but in accordance with the good judgment and good taste of Connecticut consumers.

This will help us in Bridgeport, where our own Asylum Distillery plans to expand from a relatively obscure cement block factory to a renovated space in the historic People’s Bank Building downtown. It’s a beautiful space with marble walls and a vaulted ceiling capped with stained glass.

Bordering the historic McLevy Green, it will offer customers a dramatic setting in which to enjoy the quality spirits and the novelty of seeing them distilled on site. This kind of retail experience, one that offers an encounter – with great architecture, with historic settings, with creative craftsmanship – is what draws people into cities nationwide. This is the entrepreneurial culture we’re cultivating in Bridgeport. The new Harlen Haus German Beer Hall is packing them in. Brewport, our premier brew pub is enjoying its second successful year by the Harbor Yard Ballpark which itself is being converted into an outdoor musical amphitheater to open in the spring of 2019.

Asylum Distillery will add to this ambience. We all know that traditional retail has imploded, either evaporated into the ether of the internet or stripped of sales in the strip mall sprawl that is such an anathema to the younger car-averse consumers who are changing society today, and not always to our benefit in Connecticut where the “Land of Steady Habits” has been in the steady habit of losing its talented young people to other states with more dynamic urban centers.

The kind of bill we’d ask you to pass can help us combat this trend. This matters. It matters on Main Street; and it will make a difference.

You’ve heard of cities pursuing T.O.D. – transit-oriented development. Add to that now, B.O.D. – booze-oriented development. As funny as that may sound, the presence of such enterprises – brew pubs, craft distilleries – is actually one of the leading indices tracked by site selectors and developers to measure the desirability of a city.

We’d ask you to pass the kind of legislation that will help us continue to become a more dynamic urban center. Don’t stop at an incremental ounce. That would be nothing more than a pointless ounce of prevention preventing Asylum Distillery from moving forward on a profitable basis. Put distilleries on par with brew pubs and watch them grow. Let consumers fill their glasses. Let Bridgeport fill a beautiful

downtown space with a dynamic business. And when this is done, come on down. With your help, drinks will be on us. Thank you and I will be happy to answer any questions you have.

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