

February 17th, 2021

Dear Delegate/Senator:

Hello. My name is Katie Wargo, and I am a lifelong resident of Pasadena, MD and currently serve as coalition coordinator for Northern Lights Against Substance Abuse, a community group that works to prevent substance abuse and misuse in the county, especially among youth and young adults. I am writing in opposition to Senate Bill 763 and House Bill 996 Class A Licenses – Retail Grocery Establishments (Healthy Food Accountability Act of 2021) , which we believe runs counter to our public mission of limiting easy access for alcohol to youth.

Based on our observations and experience it would be hard for grocery stores, delivery-based retailers, and convenience stores to regulate alcohol sales to minors and we must oppose allowing these establishments in the county on a permanent basis, which will likely cause our county to have further serious problems with underage access.

NLASA works together with three other coalitions across Anne Arundel County with support from the Anne Arundel County Health Department. We've worked closely with area schools, youth organizations, liquor stores and restaurateurs for years to ensure that staff and businesses encourage responsible service and consumption.

This work is especially important to me because I have lost both of my twin brothers to mental health disorders and substance misuse. Like many of you and your constituents, I have experienced the loss and pain that come from losing many family members and friends over the last decade to this horrible disease. Prevention is now my passion, which is why I am addressing you with my concerns.

One major concern with allowing these types of establishments to hold a Class A Liquor License is that it tends to allow both businesses and customers to throw aside many of the best practices that the industry uses to prevent underage sale and access to alcohol, including ID checks and observation about the customer's current state.

Our other major concern with grocery stores, delivery-based retailers, and convenience stores holding a liquor license is businesses already practice safe alcohol sales and now we would have to teach these new establishments these safe practices. Many cashiers at grocery stores and convenient stores are only sixteen years of age and by law you must be eighteen years of age or older to serve or handle alcohol. This would take away jobs for our youth.

Since we are already living in a COVID-19, socially-distant world, by allowing grocery stores, delivery-based retailers, and convenience stores to obtain a Class A Liquor License it would take away from our small businesses like package good stores that are already struggling to keep their doors open.

We are asking that you oppose these measures in the house and senate. If possible, we would ask that the Anne Arundel County Delegation request that our County be exempted from the statewide bill. Please feel free to contact me if I can answer any question, or clarify any information about this issue and our work with Northern Lights, and thank you.

Sincerely,
Katie Wargo
Coalition Coordinator
Northern Lights Against Substance Abuse
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