



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL  
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

ANDREW FRIEDSON  
COUNCILMEMBER  
DISTRICT 1

February 17, 2021

The Honorable Dereck E. Davis  
Chair, Economic Matters Committee  
House Office Building, Room 231  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Position: Support for House Bill 996 – *Alcoholic Beverages – Class A Licenses – Retail Grocery Establishments (Healthy Food Accountability Act of 2021)***

Chairman Davis:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 996 and express my appreciation to Delegate Lily Qi, and Senator Cory McCray, who has introduced a cross-filed version in the Senate, for their leadership on this commonsense legislation, which would produce a significant and long-overdue benefit to Maryland and Montgomery County consumers.

For decades, Montgomery County residents have been perplexed by the fact that they cannot buy beer and wine while on their regular trip to the grocery store or a similar establishment. This confusion is exacerbated by rare exceptions to the archaic law dating back to 1978 when the Maryland General Assembly changed the law which previously allowed grocery stores to purchase a single license to sell beer and wine to an outright ban, grandfathering in several grocery store locations in Montgomery County fortunate enough to have been operating before that time. For 43 years, this has created an unfair benefit to a limited few at the expense of many other establishments, not to mention the adverse impacts on consumer choice and convenience. The unnecessary complication and confusion highlight an antiquated system of alcohol regulation in Montgomery County especially, and throughout Maryland more broadly. This legislation is one positive reform among many that are needed to meet the current expectations of consumers and the modern demands of a rapidly changing retail landscape.

Today, Maryland is one of only three states that prohibit beer sales in chain stores and one of only ten states that prohibit wine sales in chain stores. Maryland has been operating under similarly outdated laws for 80 years. Along with Montgomery County's government-controlled alcohol monopoly, this policy further exacerbates the challenges facing residents and businesses related to price, choice, and convenience.

Like most counties in Maryland, Montgomery County is a border jurisdiction. This unnecessary prohibition, and many like it, place the county at a significant competitive disadvantage. Based on economic data and

overwhelming anecdotal evidence, Maryland consumers, especially in Montgomery County, are voting with their proverbial wallets and choosing to spend their disposable income elsewhere in the region.

The bottom line is that consumers want choice. They want convenience. They want better prices driven by increased competition. They want more food stores to help address food deserts. Maryland is one of only a few states left where you cannot purchase beer in a grocery store, yet a consumer can literally buy anything at any moment on the Internet. It is long past time to meet the needs of our residents and the demands of the modern marketplace. This legislation represents a significant step in a positive direction, and I respectfully request your favorable report. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in strong support.