



1050 17th Street, N.W.
Suite 1150
Washington, DC 20036
202.525.5717

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www.rstreet.org

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Testimony of Christian Cámara
Southeast Region Director, R Street Institute
House Government Operations and Technology Appropriations Subcommittee

Mr. Chairman and Members:

My name is Christian Cámara. I am the Southeast Region director for the R Street Institute, a nonpartisan, public-policy research organization, or "think tank," based in Washington, D.C., whose mission is to use outreach and policy research to promote free markets and limited, effective government.

We have done some work on alcohol regulation, and I'm here today because we find that Florida's current alcohol separation law needlessly creates extra costs for affected businesses and inconvenience for consumers, which is why we are one of only a handful of states that legally requires such a barrier.

The most common argument against removing this restriction is that doing so will increase underage access to alcohol. But the research does not back up this claim. There are 30 states that do not have such a barrier requirement, yet their underage drinking statistics are generally in line with states that do.

Another argument is that it will put liquor stores out of business. Again, there is no basis for this claim, as states without such a barrier law have robust and thriving liquor-store markets. In fact, in most of these states, the small retailers have a majority of the liquor-store licenses, and thus, greater market share than the big-box retailers. One expects this would be especially true in Florida, given our alcohol quota system.

I would argue that this bill could very well benefit "mom and pop" package stores, especially in rural areas where there may not be a nearby grocery. This bill would allow a rural-area liquor store to sell eggs, milk and other groceries, sparing residents from having to drive several miles to the nearest grocery.

The state has a duty to ensure public safety, including preventing access to those who are underage. Businesses that already sell alcohol and abide by these safeguards should not be required to incur needless major expenses just to sell other kinds of alcohol. Industry protectionism is not the proper role of government

I'll be happy to take any questions.