

Class L and Class MD License Testimony, February 17, 2020

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Chairman Davis, Economic Matters Committee Members,

My name is Taka Amano, and I have been a resident, parent, small business owner and entrepreneur in Montgomery County and Frederick County for 19 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today to ask your support of HB1045 and HB1046.

In August 2015 we registered Azabu Distilling Co., LLC here in Silver Spring. In 2016 we established a distillery inside the FITCI biotech incubator in Frederick, Maryland doing business as American Shochu Company. We are the first and only genuine shochu distillery in North America, right here in Maryland.

Shochu, pronounced like “trade SHOW” “CHEW-bacca”, is the other traditional Japanese spirit, the *not* sake. They’ve sold more shochu than sake in Japan for the last fifteen years.

In the past year, we have introduced shochu to Marylanders by sampling and selling bottles at farmer’s markets and events around the state in Frederick Co., Montgomery Co., Anne Arundel Co., St. Mary’s Co., and Allegany Co. This is something that we couldn’t have done without the Off-Site Permit law passed last year by the General Assembly, and I would like to thank you for your support of our industry.

We are currently in liquors stores in Frederick Co., Prince Georges Co., Baltimore Co., Howard Co., Anne Arundel Co., and all 26 Montgomery County ABS liquor stores.

Last month, I was informed by Mr. Kent Massie, the Division Chief of Retail Operations for Montgomery County ABS, that in the last 365 days, our UMAI! Shochu brand had sold in the top 4% of SKUs in the Montgomery County ABS system, putting us in the same qualification as stocked National Brands, the first time for a Maryland Made* local brand, and making our Umai! Shochu the top selling Maryland Made brand in Montgomery County!

This is an early indication that our new customers and fans that we have met through the farmer’s markets and statewide events are coming back to purchase additional bottles from our liquor store partners.

We could not have accomplished this early success without the exceptional support of the General Assembly of our still young distilling industry. Thank you so much!

At American Shochu Company, we still operate out of a tiny incubator space, and don’t have a tasting room. HB1045 and HB1046 before you today would allow some of our distillery colleagues to offer our products for sampling in their tasting rooms, and would be another help in promoting shochu, the Newest American Spirit made only in Maryland!

I ask your support of HB1045 and HB1046.

Thank you,
Taka Amano

* The link to the Montgomery County ABS Maryland Made Program page is:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ABS/Promotions/MarylandMadeProgram.html>