

Written testimony

SB 603

Thomas Yates, Petite Cellars

Unfavorable

My name is Thomas J Yates and from 1987 to 2012 I was a licensee at Olney Beer & Fine Wine 18208 Village Center Dr Olney Md (Montgomery County). The business was truly "mom & pop" involving my wife and children as well as my brother and one of his sons. We had a reputation as one of the best beer and wine stores in the county. Six families got primary support from wages paid!

In 2011 Safeway applied to transfer their grandfathered license from Briggs Chaney to their new store in Olney. I testified in opposition to no avail. It appeared that big money won the day. It was well known within the trade that my store would be their first target to put out of business. To that end, they started out on opening day selling many products below cost and, in violation of state law, required distributor reps to stock shelves. When I complained to The Comptroller's Office I was told that they had been warned, but the practice continued. After 1 year of their opening my sales were down 40%. I chose not to stay and watch the rest go away, so I closed April 30, 2012. In November that year I moved out of Montgomery County. Two years after I closed the next independent to close was Pritti Beer and Wine at the corner of Georgia Ave and Route 108 in Olney. There is only one more small store to put out of business before Safeway becomes "the only act in town".

I know that grocery and big box stores are pouring big resources into Maryland to convert it to a "chain market" but my experience is that this is just the tip of the iceberg of the many families who will be put out of work. Many of the owners of the small stores are first generation immigrants seeking the American Dream. I have continued my pursuit of the dream at my new store, Petite Cellars, in Ellicott City Howard County. If the chains succeed I will once again be put out of business by "big box"! For those who claim that allowing supermarkets into the business of selling alcohol won't affect small businesses, I offer up my experience as proof of the opposite. I therefore ask that you vote against HB 153—Dispensaries in Supermarkets.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom J. Yates", written in a cursive style.

Tom Yates
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