



March 2, 2026

Re: Opposition to 2026 House Bill 1303 — Alcoholic Beverages Modernization Act of 2026

Dear Chair and Honorable Members of the Economic Matters committee:

On behalf of the Harford County Chamber of Commerce and our 700 + local business and non-profit members, I write to express strong opposition to House Bill 1303 (“Alcoholic Beverages Modernization Act of 2026”). While we appreciate the intent to modernize Maryland’s liquor laws, this bill—which would dramatically expand beer and wine retail sales into grocery stores and other non-specialty outlets—poses a significant threat to locally owned beer and wine stores and the small business economy throughout Harford County and across the State of Maryland.

Small, independent beer and wine retailers have been a bedrock of our local economies, often family-owned for generations, providing specialized knowledge, curated product offerings, and community engagement that larger retailers cannot replicate. These businesses operate on thin margins, reinvest profits locally, employ County residents, and contribute to the vibrancy of our downtowns and neighborhoods.

Expanding Class A licenses to grocery stores and other non-specialty stores under HB 1303 would undercut the very market that enables these local retailers to survive. Grocery and big-box stores, with economies of scale and deep corporate resources, would be able to absorb losses on beer and wine to attract customers, leaving smaller stores struggling to compete. In jurisdictions that have liberalized similar alcohol sales laws, independent alcohol retailers have faced closures or severe revenue declines due to intensified competition from larger retailers (i.e. Florida).

The Maryland Legislative Services fiscal notes and small business community testimony from similar proposals in previous sessions have identified that removing the limited licensing protections currently in place increases the likelihood of store closings and consolidation — particularly in economically vulnerable areas. While proponents claim consumer convenience, small specialty retailers contribute far beyond simple product

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sales, including serving as local economic anchors, supporting craft brewers and vintners, and preserving consumer access to diverse products that mass retailers often overlook.

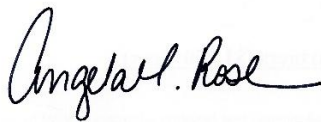
Moreover, HB 1303 threatens to shift consumer spending from locally owned enterprises to national grocery chains, reducing the circulation of dollars within the local economy. Research and community experience in other states show that when grocery stores obtain broad beer and wine sales privileges, small liquor and beer/wine stores are disproportionately harmed, with closures mounting as they fail to compete on price and convenience.

We believe that thoughtful reform of Maryland's liquor laws should protect small business owners and preserve local economic ecosystems, not disrupt them for the benefit of larger corporate entities. Policy changes should include safeguards — such as supply protections, licensing restrictions, and support for existing small retailers — that ensure local businesses are not displaced.

For these reasons, the Harford County Chamber of Commerce respectfully urges you to oppose HB 1303 in its current form. We welcome ongoing dialogue with lawmakers and stakeholders to explore legislative proposals that modernize alcohol laws while protecting family-owned businesses that are vital to Maryland's community fabric and economic resilience.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela M. Rose". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a faint, light-colored rectangular stamp.

Angela M. Rose
President & CEO
Harford County Chamber of Commerce

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