

Jennifer Yang's Written Testimony (April 2026)

In Support of HB1526: Class 1 Distillery On-Premises Consumption Permit

To the Maryland State Senators:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a written testimony in support of HB1526. My name is Jennifer Yang. I am one of the owners of Covalent Spirits, a small distillery in Westminster, MD. I am writing with the support of Patapsco Distilling Company in Sykesville, MD. We are currently the only 2 distilleries in Carroll Co.

Under existing Maryland law, the Carroll County Board of License Commissioners already issues on-premises consumption permits to Class 1 distilleries. HB1526 does not create a new concept of an on-premise consumption permit. Instead, it codifies the existing practice as its own permit category for the county, and with that, enables the county to add clarifying language, such as allowing distilleries to clearly and legally offer food and non-alcoholic beverages.

In terms of the food and non-alcoholic beverages, there is also clear precedent for this approach. In 2024, the Frederick County delegation passed similar legislation to establish an on-premises consumption permit for Class 1 distilleries and permitted distilleries to sell food and non-alcoholic beverages. HB1526 extends that framework to Carroll County.

I have been told that if something is not explicitly written into law, it is thus not permitted. But when it comes to non-alcoholic beverages and food, there is a gray area with current regulations for distilleries. One wouldn't think selling a soda or mocktail would be an issue, but I've heard stories of distilleries getting scrutiny for selling a soda or pack of crackers. We can sell a rum and coke but not just coke? A vodka cran but not just a glass of cran?

Food also is not explicitly written as allowed. But as a place that sells spirits, we should be able to sell food too. It's for public safety! We are not looking to be a restaurant. We want to offer our customers a better (and safer) experience without fear of being reprimanded. While we have partnered with food vendors in the past, they are not always reliable, and we cannot predict how busy they will be. So often, it isn't worth it for the food vendors to sell at our distillery.

By explicitly authorizing non-alcoholic beverage and food under a codified permit structure, the bill improves the visitor experience while maintaining strong local oversight and regulatory controls. Craft distilleries are important economic drivers in Maryland. They attract visitors, support local farmers and suppliers, create jobs, and help revitalize historic downtowns. In Carroll County, Covalent Spirits and Patapsco Distilling occupy historic buildings – buildings that are over 100 years old that we had to renovate and revitalize. Our businesses serve as anchors for tourism, events, small business development, and Main Street development in our towns. Aligning distillery privileges with contemporary hospitality models will strengthen these economic and community benefits.

For these reasons, I hope the Maryland Senate supports and passes HB1526. Thank you for your consideration.