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UNFAVORABLE - SB 75 - ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES - CLASS A LICENSE - FOOD RETAILERS

Dear Chair Beidle and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I am writing in strong opposition to Senate Bill 75 (SB 75), on behalf of The Wine Source, an independent specialty retailer based in Baltimore. We appreciate the opportunity to submit this written testimony for the record representing our employees and worker-owners.

Founded more than 30 years ago in Hampden, The Wine Source has grown into a destination for wine, beer, spirits, gourmet foods, and education. In 2024, the longtime owner sold the business to a group of employees to ensure that the company would remain locally rooted and community governed. We then transitioned The Wine Source into a Worker-Owned Cooperative where today, we employ 42 staff members, 10 of whom are worker-owners. Most of our employees depend on the continued strength of this business to support their families, earn income while pursuing their education, and build long-term careers.

As a cooperative, we intentionally operate differently from corporate chains. We provide wages that exceed industry standards, offer meaningful employee benefits, invest in professional development and reinvest profits locally rather than distributing them to out-of-state shareholders. Our model depends on stable revenue in core categories such as beer and wine. If routine volume migrates to large grocery chains, it directly affects our ability to retain staff at competitive wages and provide generous benefits.

For that reason, we respectfully urge the Committee to look beyond the framing of this bill as a matter of “consumer convenience” and consider its long-term structural impact on Maryland’s independent retail ecosystem. We do not believe Maryland is “out of step”. Rather, Maryland’s regulatory structure has intentionally fostered one of the strongest independent retail communities in the country.

Greater availability does not necessarily mean greater choice. In grocery settings, shelf space is determined by national purchasing contracts and supplier scale. Independent retailers are able to curate diverse selections and provide access for small importers, craft producers, and regional breweries. Expanding grocery store sales risks increasing uniformity rather than expanding meaningful consumer choice.

Alcohol in grocery stores functions as a traffic driver. National chains can absorb thin margins on beer and wine to increase total basket sales. Independent stores, on the other hand, rely on these categories as core operating revenue, “bread and butter” items if you will. SB 75 would create a structural imbalance in which billion-dollar corporations can treat alcohol as a promotional tool while small businesses depend on it to sustain payroll and benefits. Even when

legislation in other states includes license transfer provisions, they function primarily as exit mechanisms rather than long-term protections for small businesses.

We would also respectfully like to address the argument that expanding grocery alcohol sales could improve conditions in “food deserts.” Access to affordable and healthy food is a serious issue, particularly in communities like Baltimore, however, alcohol sales are not a solution to food insecurity. Public policy designed to address food access should focus directly on incentives for full-service grocery operations, fresh produce supply chains, and community-based food initiatives, not on expanding alcohol retail as a strategy.

This debate is not about resisting modernization or competition. As a small business, we support innovation and believe in vibrant, fair competition. The question before the Committee is whether Maryland wishes to move from a locally owned, community-centered alcohol marketplace to one increasingly governed by national chain retailers and multinational beverage corporations.

Maryland policymakers frequently express strong support for “buy local” values. We respectfully ask the Committee to consider whether SB 75 advances those values in practice. When policy decisions disproportionately benefit these national chains and corporations, it is appropriate to ask whether the outcome aligns with Maryland’s stated commitment to protecting small, locally owned businesses.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,



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On Behalf The Wine Source

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