

My Name is Norman Hale and I own & operate Market Beer Wine Spirits, a small independent liquor store located in Johnston, RI. I am writing in opposition to House Bills 5502 and 6054.

I agree that nips are a problem, causing potential for drinking and driving and pollution, but I believe there are other ways to try and resolve these issues that will not unduly burden small independent businesses like mine.

For example, a small charge (\$.05, perhaps would not be unduly burdensome) could be collected on all nips at the distributor level and the distributors would then send money to each town for the specific purpose of cleanup. The distributors are in a better position than small stores, like mine, to deal with this because they already have people and resources in place to handle such a solution administratively. The distributors are already doing something similar with the collection of excise taxes on wine and spirits. It would not be unduly burdensome for the distributors to incorporate such a collection practice into their current business models. On the other hand, overseeing the collection and redemption of deposits, the collection and disposal of empty containers and the administrative paperwork involved would be truly problematic for small businesses like mine to figure out and administer.

Adding a ten or twenty-five cent deposit on nips would put Rhode Island store owners at a huge competitive disadvantage over liquor stores in neighboring states. As you are aware, Rhode is a very small state, making it very easy for our customers to travel out of state to buy nips. If RI nips are twenty-five cents higher than nips sold in MA and CT, not only would RI liquor stores lose sales, the State of Rhode Island will also lose a significant tax revenue stream.

In conclusion, because these bills would be unduly burdensome on Rhode Island's small businesses and result in a tax loss for the State of Rhode Island, I, like other independent store owners in Rhode Island, care about our communities and the State of Rhode Island. I spend significant time every week picking up nips in the area surrounding my store. There have also been several instances where I have had to stop selling to customers and refer them to Alcoholics Anonymous. I am sure if you speak with small store owners, like myself, the distributors who bring these products into the state and other organizations that care about our State, you will find a solution that addresses the problems associated with empty bottles and the drinking and driving issues that is fair to small business and does not restrict tax revenues. Unfortunately, these heavy handed bills do not represent good solutions.

Thank you for considering my arguments.

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