

Tenn. House to Vote on Supermarket Wine Sales

ERIK SCHELZIG, Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The state House is scheduled to vote Thursday morning on a bill to allow [wine to be sold in Tennessee supermarkets](#) [1].

The bill, sponsored by Republican Rep. Jon Lundberg of Bristol, would allow cities and counties that currently allow package stores or liquor-by-the-drink sales to hold referendums on whether to allow wine to be sold outside of liquor stores.

Lundberg said he will seek approval for changes to minimum-store-size requirements and fees to bring the measure into line with the Senate version that passed 23-8 last month.

The bill would allow for local votes to take place as early as this fall, but would not allow supermarket wine sales until July 2016. Lundberg says that delay is necessary to give liquor stores a chance to prepare for the change.

"Would I like to make it tomorrow? Sure," said Lundberg. "But on the other side, as a business person you've got to give somebody the time to make that change, especially when they went into the business saying here's the model and it hasn't changed ever."

Before a final vote can take place on the House bill, the chamber will consider several proposed changes. They include effectively removing convenience stores by setting the minimum store size at 5,000 square feet, including high-alcohol beer and moving the effective date up next year.

Lundberg says those proposals could derail a carefully crafted compromise on the bill in which "nobody's overly happy, because nobody's come out as the sole winner."

Under current law, supermarkets and convenience stores can sell beer containing up to 6.5 percent alcohol by volume. Anything stronger can only be sold in package stores, which can't sell anything beyond booze and lottery tickets.

While the concept of supermarket wine sales has broad public support according to various polls, the measure had failed in several consecutive legislative sessions amid opposition from liquor wholesalers and package store owners.

But House Speaker Beth Harwell, R-Nashville, and Senate Speaker Ron Ramsey, R-Blountville, have been major proponents of allowing supermarket wine sales, forcing the long-resistant liquor wholesalers and retailers to the negotiating table.

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