

Most Marylanders support changing Brewery laws

Posted by [TBNDavid](#) On 08/14/2017

ANNAPOLIS, Md.- An overwhelming majority of Marylanders support fundamental changes to the state's alcohol laws that govern the production, distribution, and sale of beer, according to the results of an online survey released today by Comptroller Peter Franchot.

"Maryland's current beer laws are dysfunctional and outdated and work to the detriment of consumers and small business," said Comptroller Franchot in response to the unscientific survey. "Without comprehensive reform, Maryland's reputation within the national craft brewing industry will continue to suffer. We must have laws that make sense for all the stakeholders and promote economic growth for all three tiers and create the best market for Maryland consumers."

This past spring, the Comptroller announced the formation of a Reform on Tap Task Force to do a comprehensive review of the state's antiquated laws governing the manufacturing, distribution, and sale of Maryland craft beer. Forty task force members, representing every region of the state from large and small breweries, distributors, restaurants, bars and retailers, consumers and local and state officials have been meeting regularly to discuss issues affecting the industry. As a result of the meetings, an online poll was taken live from August 7 to 11. During that time, 2,472 respondents completed the survey. Below are the questions and the results:

Question 1: What is your opinion on the limits on craft beer production in Maryland law?

■ 72 percent of respondents said there should be no limits on beer production; while an additional 20 percent said they are too low. The remaining 8 percent said they are either too high as they are or that they are "fine" at current levels.

Question 2: What is your opinion of the sales limits in Maryland law?

■ 79 percent of respondents said there should be no sales limits; while 14 percent said these limits are too low. The remaining 7 percent said either they are too high as is or they are "fine" at current levels.

Question 3: What is your opinion of this "buy-back" provision in [HB 1283]?

■ 89 percent of respondents expressed disapproval of the buy-back provision in House Bill 1283; while 4 percent said they approved and 6 percent said they had no opinion.

Question 4: Should the business relationship between the brewer and the distributor be governed by Maryland state franchise law, or should it be subject to a private contract that is negotiated and signed by both parties?

■ 83 percent of respondents said the relationship should be governed by a "negotiated, signed contract"; while 10 said it should be governed by state franchise law and 7 saying they had no opinion on the matter.

Question 5: What is your opinion on Maryland's current self-distribution law?

■ 72 percent of respondents said there should be no such self-distribution limits, while 18 percent said the limits should be raised. Of those remaining, 7 percent said current law is reasonable, 1 percent said the limits should be lowered and 2 percent said self-distribution should be prohibited altogether in the state.

Question 6: What is your opinion on Maryland's current "take home" sales limit on one case per customer?

■ 66 percent of respondents said there should be no take-home limit while 25 percent answered that the existing limit is too low and should be raised. Of those remaining, 8 percent said the existing limit is reasonable, 1 percent said take-home sales in the state should be prohibited altogether and less than 1 percent said the existing limit is too high and should be lowered.

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