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Retail Liquor Association of Oklahoma Supports Modernization

September 10 – Oklahoma City, OK – Bryan Kerr, president of the Retail Liquor Association of Oklahoma (RLAO) just announced a number of liquor law reforms which are being proposed and supported by the members of the only organization representing local liquor stores in our state. Many will be surprised to hear this coming from a group which represents retailers who have regularly been accused of playing an obstructionist role when it comes to changing even some of the most antiquated laws that govern alcohol in Oklahoma.

Mr. Kerr extended his gratitude to Senator Stephanie Bice for creating an opportunity for dialogue when she authored SB 383¹ earlier this year. "Her guidance and willingness to work openly and honestly with all interested parties as she leads this legislation through the process has been both immensely helpful and appreciated. The senator clearly has the interests of all Oklahomans in mind as she crafts legislation that modernizes Oklahoma liquor laws; balancing convenience and access with public safety, enforcement and the impact on locally owned businesses."

Speaking on behalf of the RLAO, Mr. Kerr said, "This summer, we conducted a poll through the most respected pollster in Oklahoma, Bill Shapard of Sooner Poll, and we heard the customer loud and clear. We are committed to meeting the needs of the Oklahoma consumer without sacrificing public safety or increasing access of the product to teens and others who should not have it."

The Retail Liquor Association of Oklahoma has proposed these extensive changes:

1. Oklahoma should move to single strength ("strong") refrigerated beer for all outlets which currently sell either "3.2" or "strong" beer.
2. As a matter of convenience, wine should be available for purchase in a limited number of grocery stores.
3. Customers should be able to buy mixers, corkscrews, glassware, cigars and other items inside their local Retail Package Store.
4. Customers should be able to order our products and have them delivered by a properly licensed employee of a Retail Package Store.
5. Customers should be allowed to attend tastings inside the premises of a Retail Package Store.
6. Customers should be permitted to bring their child with them into a Retail Package Store.
7. Customers should be allowed to buy liquor, wine and beer from a Retail Package Store on Independence Day, Memorial Day & Labor Day.
8. Customers should have access to growlers and "crowlers" filled and sealed at a Retail Package Store.

The Retail Liquor Association of Oklahoma has also come out strongly in favor of allowing Oklahoma breweries to sell their own full-strength product at the brewery itself, either by the glass or in cans and bottles. Mr. Kerr said, "It seems silly and unfair that a consumer can go to any winery in our state and enjoy a glass of wine and then buy a bottle of that exact product but they can't do the same at Oklahoma breweries." In addition, the RLAO is proposing that Oklahoma wineries have a cap lifted on the amount of wine they can produce and still be able to self-distribute that wine. "We are looking for as many ways as possible to help Oklahomans in the spirits, wine and beer business to better serve our customers. Our plan encourages economic growth and does away with antiquated laws while still protecting public safety. These are things our customers have asked for and the retailers want to help make it happen," said Kerr.

Missing from the RLAO's proposal is the ability for liquor stores to be open before 10am or after 9pm. Mr. Kerr explains, "Although it would be economically beneficial for our stores to be open more days and hours, the survey conducted by Sooner Poll showed weak support for such changes. In addition, it is just not good public policy. Dozens of studies have shown that the major contributing factors to alcohol-related crime and underage access are the density of outlets and the operating hours of those outlets.² We already have enough issues with 3.2 beer being sold in too many spots and for too many hours of the day. To compound those with even stronger alcohol while adding another 600+ outlets to the equation would be irresponsible."

An Oklahoma study done by the Alcoholic Beverage Law Enforcement commission (ABLE) demonstrated that more than 85% of all alcohol-related traffic accidents and more than 80% of all alcohol-related traffic fatalities amongst those under the age of 21 were caused solely by the consumption of (3.2) product like Bud Light³; product either purchased or stolen from a grocery or convenience store. "Retail Package Stores are much less likely to be targeted by underage drinkers due to both the seriousness of the penalties for selling to a minor and the fact that the owner of that business is very likely to be right there to properly ID and stop such activity. Our stores are also required to employ only those at least 21 years of age and have those employees licensed through ABLE, even if they are just stocking the product. These are tried-and-true preventative measures that work. We support keeping them in place," said Kerr.

Although the RLAO has worked for incremental changes in the past, this is the first time we've seen such a comprehensive and progressive proposal from this organization. Kerr said, "Although many of the laws dealing with alcohol in Oklahoma are in the best interest of the public, some were really never needed and some have outlived their usefulness. Our proposal fully addresses this and we hope that both the legislature and the public will agree."

The Retail Liquor Association of Oklahoma was formed in 1982 and represents the many men and women who have invested their time and money into providing quality alcoholic beverages to their neighborhoods, cities and counties. The RLAO works with the legislature and other interest groups to help craft laws that benefit both Oklahoma Package Stores and the consumer.

Keep up with this legislation and the RLAO at <http://RLAO.org> or via Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/OklahomaLiquorStores>.

¹ <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB383>

² <http://alcalc.oxfordjournals.org/content/44/5/500.long>

³ <http://rlao.org/ABLEReport-Accidents&Deaths.pdf>

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