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New Massachusetts Legislation Allows Nashoba Valley Winery to Continue Operations

BY TIMOTHY H. POWELL • AUGUST 5, 2016

Just before midnight on the deadline for its most recent session this past Sunday, July 31, the Massachusetts Legislature passed an economic development bill relaxing several restrictions on the sale of alcohol in the state, including a measure that will allow Nashoba Valley Winery in Bolton, Massachusetts to continue its operations.

We reported in late June on the plight of Nashoba Valley Winery, which after 13 years of being granted "farmer-series" licenses for its winery, distillery, and brewery, as well as a pouring license for its onsite restaurant, was threatened with non-renewal of its licenses by the state Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission (ABCC). This spring the ABCC, for the first time, had interpreted the current licensing statute to prohibit simultaneously holding a pouring license and any farmer-series license, spelling doom for the business model of the small, family-owned business. The highly-publicized dispute caught the attention of several state officials, including Governor Charlie Baker, who stated that he would support action to ensure the winery's operation.

That action came this week with the passing of House Bill 4569, which explicitly allows entities holding any combination of farmer-series winery, distillery, and brewery licenses to also obtain a pouring license to sell those beverages for consumption on the grounds of the farm – for Nashoba Valley, this means being able to continue serving its wines at its on-site farmhouse restaurant. The bill is now on the Governor's desk, and is expected to be signed into law.

The final version of the bill dropped several other proposed measures aimed at addressing frustration from businesses and consumers over the state's outdated and convoluted liquor laws, including (1) a provision to allow brewers greater freedom to switch between competing beer distributors, (2) a provision that would allow consumers to fill up used growlers at breweries, and (3) a provision permitting the sale of locally-made beer and spirits at farmers markets.

Nevertheless, more sweeping revision to Massachusetts' alcohol laws may yet be coming: State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg has convened an industry task force to develop recommendations for a "21st-century alcohol law" to be

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presented to legislators next year.

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