

Cocktails-to-go should have come a year ago, Tavern League says

Posted on Tuesday, Mar 30, 2021

— The hospitality industry notched a win with Gov. Tony Evers signing a bill allowing restaurants, bars and brewpubs to sell cocktails-to-go after bipartisan passage in the Legislature.

During a WisBusiness.com event ahead of Friday's action, Tavern League of Wisconsin President Chris Marsicano, a supper club owner from Delavan, urged Evers to sign the legislation.

"It's been a long time coming," Marsicano said. "This should have happened a year ago when we were completely shut down."

Marsicano was a panelist on Thursday's WisBusiness.com virtual luncheon program, "Hospitality industry stirs after year of COVID." The lunch hour event featured Wisconsin's eatery and alehouse leaders a year after the economy shut down as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wisconsin Restaurant Association President and CEO Kristine Hillmer explained that while restaurants were able to pivot to curbside pickup for food during capacity limits, it didn't make up for the lost margins from bar sales. She added the lack of craft cocktails also takes away from the consumer experience.

Mark Garthwaite, executive director of the Wisconsin Brewers Guild, said for brewpubs, it's frustrating to be able to send beer home with a customer, but not a

cocktail.

The cocktails-to-go bill allows a “Class B” licensed retailer, such as a restaurant or tavern, to prepare those drinks, put the beverage in a container with a tamper-evident seal, and send it with the customer. The bill was sent to the governor’s desk last week after the Senate approved it 28-2. The Assembly had approved the bill via voice vote earlier this month.

For wine, it allows the restaurant to sell a single glass of wine in a sealed container, versus having to sell the whole bottle.

The bill doesn’t change current in-person purchasing requirements. Sales must be face-to-face, giving bars and restaurants the opportunity to check IDs.

Marsicano, who owns Village Supper Club in Delavan and is a member of WRA, said his patrons have been missing their Old-Fashioneds with their fish fry. A neighboring Mexican restaurant, Marsicano said, will use the new law to sell margaritas to go. The profits could be up to \$600 per month for some of his members.

“This is going to be great for us; I think it’s a little late, but we’ll take it,” he said.

Watch the WisBusiness.com virtual luncheon [here](#).

See earlier coverage regarding the issue [here](#) and [here](#).

-By Stephanie Hoff



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