

Lawmakers urged to allow e-commerce alcohol sales, reduce retail theft

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A spokesperson for grocers in Wisconsin is urging lawmakers to take action this session to allow e-commerce alcohol sales and reduce retail theft.

Jim Hyland, vice president of communications and public affairs for Roundy's Supermarkets, spoke yesterday during a hearing hosted by the Assembly Committee on Jobs, Economy and Small Business Development.

He said the grocery industry continues to work through a "pandemic-induced hangover," highlighting inflation as a major concern for both consumers and grocers. Against that backdrop of higher prices, he said online grocery shopping will "continue to play a key role" for the industry this year.

"The pandemic years propelled digital grocery sales into the mainstream and had grocers scrambling to optimize their e-commerce offerings as shopping habits shifted toward buying groceries online for obvious reasons," he said.

Citing industry data, he said digital grocery sales grew more than 40 percent in 2020 compared to the previous year. While that growth has since leveled off, he said online grocery sales are still three or four times as high as pre-pandemic levels and rising faster than in-store grocery as a percentage of the total U.S. market this year.

He added the average annual spend for a digital grocery shopper is estimated to rise from \$850 in 2021 to \$1,500 in 2025. With that trend in mind, he called for legislation to allow for "seamless integration of alcohol within an e-commerce grocery order" including both curbside pickup or delivery. He said such a bill "would be beneficial to the millions of grocery customers" in Wisconsin.

"We think we can be much more efficient as a grocer if we get that passed," he said.

Meanwhile, he noted retail theft at grocery stores has also increased in recent years, and called on legislators to consider passing a law to address that “major problem” for the industry. He described an “organized retail crime approach” to such theft, which involves selling the stolen goods online or elsewhere.

“We’re hoping the Wisconsin Legislature will consider retail theft legislation during the current session that will give serial offenders as well as those contemplating retail theft second thoughts about their actions,” he said.

Watch a video of the hearing:

<https://wiseye.org/2023/03/08/assembly-committee-on-jobs-economy-and-small-business-development-2/>

-By Alex Moe