

WILL: Coalition of free market groups urge lawmakers to oppose “wedding barn” legislation

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The News: A coalition of free market groups including the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL), Institute for Justice, Badger Institute, MacIver Institute, National Taxpayers Union, Americans for Tax Reform, and the Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association have issued a [new memo](#) to lawmakers highlighting problems with certain provisions in AB 304/SB 332, particularly as the bill relates to the regulation of Wisconsin’s “wedding barn” industry.

The Quote: Lucas Vebber, WILL Deputy Counsel, stated, “Unlike a bar or a restaurant, an apartment or a vacation home—or a public venue—is not open to the general public. Lawmakers should remove the public venue regulatory changes from this legislation and not use the heavy hand of government to destroy an entire industry in Wisconsin.”

Background: Wisconsin law requires a liquor license in two instances: (1) for the sale of alcohol (Wis. Stat. § 125.04(1)) and (2) for the consumption of alcohol in a “public place” (Wis. Stat. § 125.09(1)). For years, farmers have legally rented out their barns to wedding parties—allowing the newlyweds to bring their own alcohol and serve it to their guests if they so choose—because neither of these circumstances apply to wedding barns, which are not “public places.”

However, provisions within the omnibus bill would upend this long-standing tradition and expand the definition of “public place” to cover wedding barns and other private event venues, leaving owners one of two options. They would either need to become licensed in the same manner as a tavern or operate under a “no-sale event venue permit.” That permit would limit wedding barns (and other private event

venues) to operating no more than six days per year, and a maximum of one day per month. Liquor consumption would also be prohibited. Operating in the same manner as a tavern is not an option for many existing venues because of zoning restrictions or the investments necessary to qualify for a Class-B license.

Our Call to Action: In our memo, we note that AB 304/SB 332 contains a number of other changes to Wisconsin's three tier alcohol regulation system. Our opposition is strictly focused on changes to public venues and the regulation of wedding barns.

Read More:

- [Wedding Barn Memo to Policymakers](#), August 3, 2023