

June 10, 2019

**STATE AND NATIONAL CONSERVATIVE GROUPS EXPRESS MAJOR CONCERN
OVER POTENTIAL MOTION TO STOP WEDDING BARNs**

Members of the Wisconsin Legislature:

It has come to our attention that there may be an effort underway to curtail the Agricultural Event Venue (“AEV”) industry, commonly referred to as “Wedding Barns,” in the Joint Committee on Finance. This change in liquor licensing laws – which has been rejected several times in recent years – would infringe upon a farmer’s ability to freely rent out his or her barn to brides and grooms, devastating Wisconsin’s proud tradition of wedding barns. **As a complete affront to economic freedom and limited government, this change, if proposed, should be rejected.**

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 bride and groom to bring alcohol, if they so choose. The barn owner does not sell the alcohol. And the weddings are purely private events. Only personally invited guests can attend.

Wedding barns do not become “public places” under the liquor licensing law simply because they are available to rent, just like how your apartment or vacation home does not become a “public place” simply because members of the public rent it. In both cases, premises are being leased for the exclusive use of the lessee. Unlike a bar or a restaurant, an apartment or a vacation home—and a wedding barn—is not open to the general public.

Seen in this way, a wedding barn is nothing like a tavern. But special interests don’t like even the slightest competition and they are more than willing to enlist the government’s help in protecting them from new ideas and competitors. In recent years, there have been several failed attempts to amend the liquor license law to require a permit for certain “places that are not public places.” This, presumably, is an attempt to require farmers to obtain licenses for weddings at their barns.

But this would regulate wedding barns out of existence as many simply cannot obtain licenses either because they are unavailable (due to statutory limits on the number of licenses) or because a struggling farm family, who is not seeking to run a tavern but simply to earn a little money by letting others use their barn, can’t afford the investment in a license that is intended for a very different type of activity. Moreover, **these far-reaching changes would create licensing requirements for a whole host of new Wisconsinites, threatening everything from drinking a beer while tailgating to serving wine at dinner parties while renting that vacation home.**

Lastly, it’s worth pointing out that non-fiscal policy has no place in the state budget and certainly should not be an infamous “999” motion. If the destruction of wedding barns is a good idea, then let it be debated as a standalone piece of legislation, rather than smuggled into the budget or

snuck into a last minute amendment. What is spoken in the dark will be heard in the daylight. In fact, we'll make sure that it is.

But under no circumstances should this change be discussed as part of the biennial budget process. To do so would be a violation of the trust of the public and an endorsement of heavy-handed government over Wisconsin's wedding barns.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

