

Governor: State should allow wine shipments  
Rick Pluta  
July 4, 2005

Governor Granholm says she wants to craft a law this summer that would allow direct-to-consumer wine shipments in Michigan. The U-S Supreme Court says the state must either allow wineries all across the country to ship to Michigan customers, or ban mail-order wine sales entirely.

Michigan Public Radio's Rick Pluta has more.

Until recently, the state only allowed Michigan wineries to ship to Michigan customers. The Supreme Court said that's illegal.

The state's influential network of wine distributors is now backing legislation to ban all wine shipments – which would leave them with a virtual wine-selling monopoly. But wineries say ending mail-order sales would force some of them out of business. And Governor Granholm says wineries are a growing part of the state's agriculture economy.

I think it is important to find a solution that does not damage the small wineries, but still maintains some of the features of the regulatory system.

She says that includes finding safeguards against teenagers using the mail and the Internet to buy alcohol. The wine distributors say the only way to ensure that is to ban direct shipping. For Michigan Public Radio, this is Rick Pluta.

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Governor Granholm's weighing in on the debate over allowing wineries to ship directly to consumers. The governor says she wants to help small wineries stay in business by allowing direct-to-consumer shipments.

The U-S Supreme Court has held the state must either allow out-of-state wineries to ship to customers in Michigan, or forbid Michigan wineries from mailing wine.

The governor says she wants a law that would allow shipping, but also would protect consumers and keep teenagers from using the mail to buy alcohol.

It could be a very dangerous thing, if you are allowing the sale of moonshine, or if you're buying over the Internet and you have no idea from whom you're buying, or if kids have access. So I think there is a balanced compromise position that can be reached, and I expect we'll be working on that over the summer.

The state House is considering a bill to ban all direct-to-customer wine shipments. That legislation is backed by the state's network of wine distributors, who are looking to protect their businesses. They say a ban is the only way to ensure that minors don't use the mail to buy alcohol.

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Governor Granholm says she hopes the Legislature will find a way to allow Michigan wineries to ship directly to consumers. Michigan needs to change its law to comply with a U-S Supreme Court decision. The court said the state can't allow Michigan wineries to ship directly to consumers, without allowing out-of-state wineries to sell directly to Michigan wine drinkers.

The state House is considering a total ban on shipping wine.

But the state's wineries say a ban would damage their businesses. In some cases, they say, direct shipping accounts for a third of their sales.

The governor says she's also opposed to a ban.

I think that there is an opportunity to craft a balanced approach to this – to allow some personal consumption, which would not put the small wineries out of business – but still retain the important aspects of wine regulation – wine, beer and spirits regulation in Michigan.

She says that would include safeguards against teenagers ordering wine through the mail.

Michigan's politically influential wine distributors are pushing for a ban. They say that's the only way to ensure minors don't use the mail and the Internet to order wine.