

House wine bill a sham

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Once the minions of the Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers in the state House dropped any pretense that they were "doing it for the kids," wine legislation came down to a straight business deal - those who were doing the bidding of the beer and wine lobby and those who weren't.

The lobby won.

The House voted 84 to 22 Wednesday essentially to give the businesses that make up the Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association a near total monopoly over wine sales in the state by taking away wineries' longtime right to sell directly to retailers and restaurants in Michigan.

The decision is an incredible abuse of power. The bill, as passed, strips an entire industry of the right to do business as it has for decades and simply hands it over to someone else. It's a multi-million dollar hijacking.

This was a bi-partisan mugging. Republicans dominate the House and set the agenda, and could have killed the bill at any time. But it was the Democrats who voted most heavily for the bill, 48 to 2. Republicans approved it 36 to 20.

This has been a charade since the Supreme Court struck down laws that blocked out-of-state wineries from shipping goods to individuals in Michigan.

Immediately, the Beer and Wine Wholesalers got behind a supposed "grass-roots" group that wrung its hands over the possibility that minors would be able to order wine through the mail. (They didn't mention how many minors walk into establishments run by their members every day and buy booze with fake IDs.)

The bill now allows wineries to ship 500 cases of wine per year to state residents.

So much for "doing it for the kids."

It is now up to the state Senate to derail this takeover. No bill restricting a right the wine industry has had for decades should even be considered.

It's a hijacking, pure and simple. It can't be tolerated.