

“Free the Grapes,” Campaign Launches to Give New Jersey Wine Consumers Freedom of Choice

Current shipping restrictions limit New Jersey residents’ access to only 4% of wineries nationwide

TRENTON, NJ (October 17, 2018) – New Jersey wine enthusiasts would enjoy the same freedom of choice as those in other states under legislation unveiled today to reform the state’s outdated laws on winery-to-consumer shipping.

New Jersey’s Free the Grapes! campaign launched at a State House press conference today that included national leaders of the effort.

The bills — S 2496, sponsored by Sens. Declan O’Scanlon Jr., Vin Gopal, Kristin Corrado and Gerald Cardinale; and A 3867, sponsored by Assembly members Andrew Zwicker, Serena DiMaso, Robert Clifton, and Jamel Holley — would allow New Jerseyans to have their favorite wines shipped to their home or office from any U.S. winery obtaining a license to ship to New Jersey.

New Jersey is one of only two states that limit consumer choice by allowing some wineries — but not others — to ship their wine based solely on how much they produce a vintage. Arbitrarily, New Jersey law today imposes a “capacity cap” that bans wineries producing more than 250,000 gallons a year from direct-shipping to consumers in the state. Wineries or wine companies that, in aggregate, produce less than that amount can ship to New Jersey consumers. Under the Free the Grapes measures, there would no longer be a capacity cap. The shipping privileges for wineries under the cap, which includes all of New Jersey’s producers, would not be affected as they already can ship directly to New Jersey consumers.

New Jersey’s capacity cap denies New Jersey consumers access to direct shipments from wineries and wine companies that craft 96% of all U.S. wine. In 43 states and the District of Columbia, adult residents can order from any U.S. winery that buys a permit to ship to that state, regardless of its size. Ohio is the only other state with a similar capacity cap on direct shipments from wineries to consumers.

“Bringing New Jersey in line with the rest of the country would be a big boost for wine lovers,” said Jeremy Benson, executive director of Free the Grapes! “The barriers in the law are extremely limiting for consumers — and for no good reason. There are more than 9,000 wineries in the country yet only 369 held New Jersey direct shipping licenses in 2017. That number will certainly increase when the bill becomes law.”

“New Jerseyans like their wine,” said Terri Cofer Beirne, Eastern Counsel of The Wine Institute. “The state is number five nationally in per capita wine consumption. But New Jersey ranks much lower in the value of wine shipped direct from wineries to consumers because of the ‘capacity cap.’”

Free the Grapes - NJ is part of a national campaign by wine lovers, wineries, and wine merchants seeking to remove restrictions on consumer choice. Among recent victories: In 2016, Pennsylvania ended various restrictions on winery-to-consumer shipping in the state; Arizona removed its 20,000 gallon capacity cap in 2016; and this month Oklahoma became the 45th state to allow wineries to ship directly to consumers.

Removing the barriers to winery direct shipping won’t just help consumers. New Jersey stands to gain \$4 million a year in revenues from the sales and excise taxes wineries would remit to the state and the license fees wineries would be required to pay, according to research by the [Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling at Rutgers University](#).

Free the Grapes! is a national coalition of wineries, consumers, and retailers aimed to augment, not replace, the existing three-tier distribution system of producers, wholesalers, and retailers with legal, regulated direct-to-consumer wine shipping. Founded in 1998 by wine industry associations, Free the Grapes! believes that consumers, not special interests, should decide which wines to purchase and how. Legal direct-to-consumer wine shipping expands consumer choice and helps America's mostly family-owned-and-operated wineries succeed. To learn more, visit freethegrapes.org and find [Free the Grapes New Jersey on Facebook](#).

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