

Ridiculous alcohol Bill will cost us thousands, say grocers

SMALL retailers are furious at the forthcoming alcohol Bill, which they say will cost them thousands and drive their customers towards larger stores.

Health Minister Simon Harris had promised to table amendments to the Public Health Alcohol Bill after facing a revolt from TDs and senators within his own party over the impact it is set to have on small businesses.

But the Convenience Stores and Newsagents Association has blasted the amendments, due to be debated in the Seanad on Wednesday, as 'ridiculous.'

The Bill proposes a 'booze curtain' will be erected in stores, effectively forcing retailers to

'Significant costs for retailers'

segregate alcohol to a different area in the shop and keep it in a closed storage unit.

The product cannot be visible to the customer and must remain closed when not in use, the legislation says. For smaller retailers, it has been decided that while alcohol may remain on display, the Bill will insist that it must be confined to a maximum of two storage units, measuring no more than one cubic metre.

CEO of the CSNA, Vincent Jennings, told the Mail the move would cost retailers anywhere between €3,000 and €40,000 and smaller shops are being disproportionately affected as they make up only 5% of alcohol sales. Mr Jennings said: 'It's laughable apart from the fact that it's so serious. We're most concerned

By James Ward
Political Correspondent

that this is going to cause significant additional costs to our members... Even the wording in the amendment talking about cubic metres - there isn't a retailer in the country that actually considers anything such as cubic metres. We would never consider anything in the measurement of cubic metres.

'What we do believe is that there will be a migration from the smaller stores into the larger ones, who are not going to be caught in the same way, because they can just cover over the entrance area into the area where alcohol sales are being made, and the product won't have to be invisible there.'

Mr Jennings warned that if the legislation passed it will give retailers only a year to comply, which would grant a license for shopfitters 'to gouge us'.

He said: 'If the amendment passes, the majority of people will have to go ahead and kit out their store.'

'Many people have had to renegotiate their loans not once but twice, they're just coming out of the recession and things are beginning to turn around. We're trying to bring in extra employment.'

'The cost of that, and having to go back to your bank and saying "my cash flow is going to be down this year because I'm going to have to invest five, 10, 20 or 40 thousand euro" - depending on the size of the store - that's going to be a significant cost to the retailers.'

He added: 'The smaller retail (stores), they represent less than 5% of the total alcohol sales, and yet they're causing such a dispro-



Supermarket giants will win: Joe Mannion in his shop

Small stores will lose

LOCAL shop owner Joe Mannion has told the Irish Daily Mail just how damaging the new rules will be for small, community-based family stores.

While the big, multinational supermarket giants can easily provide the space needed, Mr Mannion fears his business will become unviable and sales will drop by a quarter, as a result of the Public Health Alcohol Bill.

The owner of Mannion's Day-Today News in Clondalkin, west Dublin, fears the rules will simply drive his customers towards larger supermarkets.

He told the Irish Daily Mail: 'I would imagine that it would have a significant drop in sales, 20% or 25% or more.'

Asked if he was worried his customers would be driven elsewhere, he warned: 'There's

no doubt. Small shops are shutting anyway. In Clondalkin village, when we started 30 years ago, there were probably ten or 15 shops like newsagents. There's only three of us in the main village now. There's no doubt, it will be more difficult for us to get the sales we need to remain viable.'

'And when I say viable I mean for the shop to run, to pay my staff, keep the whole thing going and have some sort of return for myself.'

He had understood the Bill was envisaged to tackle low-cost booze sales in supermarkets, but that little thought was given to the impact it would have on smaller shops. Small shop owners fear that customers who go to supermarkets for a bottle of wine, will buy everything else there as well.

portionate additional expense upon us.'

The Bill is up for debate this week, but has already been criticised by a number of Fine Gael senators including Michelle Mulherin, Tim Lombard and Paddy Burke.

However, Eunan McKinney from Alcohol Action Ireland says the legislation, which doctors say will save lives, is badly needed.

'The Public Health Alcohol Bill has been sitting languishing in the Oireachtas for the last two

years,' he said. 'In the context of the legislation, it's a very modest piece of legislation. It endeavours to bring about a reduction in the overall consumption of alcohol over a period of years, and part of that process is to bring in a set of measures which would address the availability and intrusive visibility of alcohol in store.'

It also has the backing of the Vintners Federation of Ireland which it says will finally address alcohol as a public health issue.

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IDA concerned over Apple plant, but still cling to hope

By James Ward
Political Correspondent

IDA Ireland have admitted they have had serious concerns about Apple's €850million data centre at Athenry for months following a series of planning delays.

Hopes for the venture were dealt a serious blow on Friday when Apple CEO Tim Cook refused to commit to proceeding with the project during a meeting with Leo Varadkar in San Francisco. This was despite finally being given clearance for planning after two years of delays.

Speaking yesterday, IDA CEO Martin Shanahan admitted the objections to the project, which were raised by a small number of people, had impacted on Apple's plans.

He told RTÉ's This Week that it was 'obvious over the last number of months that there were concerns... given the time it was taking to get through the planning process.'

'That was much longer than anybody would have expected, certainly much longer than the company would have expected... there was always the possibility as this dragged on that it may impact on Apple's plans.'

But although Apple appear to have

Context of future plans

gone cold on the idea, Mr Shanahan says there is hope it will go ahead.

'I don't think this is the final word on it. Apple have said they will continue to consider Athenry in the context of their future plans.'

After Friday's meeting with Mr Cook, the Taoiseach told reporters that he had not received 'a start date, or a definite commitment' for the project, which is of particular importance to the Government because it signals investment west of the Shannon.

'Certainly, from our point of view, we really impressed on them very strongly how much the Government is behind the project, how we will do anything within our power to facilitate it, and how the people of Galway, and Athenry in particular, really want it to happen.'

Mr Shanahan also admitted that Ireland needs to work on providing solutions to problems such as housing supply - issues which would be considered by companies like Apple when deciding to invest.

Three in four pupils suffer exam stress

ALMOST three-quarters of secondary school students have cited exams as being a source of stress in school, while less than half felt they were satisfied with the availability of career guidance in their schools.

These are some of the findings in a new study, which took in the opinion of more than 3,000 students, who feel the teaching of maths, Irish, French, science, history and geography needs improvement.

The 'So, how was school today?' research is set to be launched today by Children's Minister Katherine Zappone and Education Minister Richard Bruton.

The Comhairle na nÓg report, which took in the opinions of 3,242 secondary-school students, found exams were a large source of stressful feelings, with 67% of partici-

By Emma Jane Hade

pants saying they 'strongly agree' and 'agree' that there is 'too much emphasis' on them in the school system.

When asked what contributes to feelings of stress in school, almost three-quarters - or 73% - said exams made them feel 'very stressed' and 'quite stressed'.

A total of 62% students said the 'pressure to complete difficult tasks' left them feeling 'very' and 'quite' stressed.

Elsewhere, under half of students, 48%, were 'very' and 'quite' satisfied with the availability of career guidance in schools. While just 44% felt the same about the 'availability of counselling/mental health supports'. Two-thirds said using IT helps them to learn, while 52% agreed and

strongly agreed that their school has very good IT facilities.

The authors of the report said 'teachers have high expectations for student learning and are encouraging of students in school'.

The report also stated that: 'Students are very dissatisfied with the style of teaching used and with the way compulsory subjects are taught. In order of priority, students in all years are most dissatisfied with the teaching of maths, Irish and English.'

'There is a mismatch between how teachers teach and how students feel they learn best. Young people prefer active learning, but only 30% of students think their teachers make learning interesting and fun.'

'While students say their teachers generally support them, many students are dissatisfied with the kind of feedback they get, and do not think they can talk to their

teachers about worries about falling behind. In general, students do not think their teachers treat all students fairly.'

The study also concluded that 'girls tend to be less positive about their experience of school than boys are'.

'Girls-only schools have higher levels of exam stress. The age and year level of students also influences their experience.'

Both ministers, in the foreword of the report, said: 'The students in this survey have so much to say; and we must listen to them.' Ms Zappone said: 'It is really important for young people, teachers and Government parties to study and respond to this extensive piece of research as it explains what young people need, and want to change, to make their journey through education better.'

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