

## **80,000 Customers Sign Petition Against Section 20 of Public Health (Alcohol) Bill**

*Immediate Release*

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- The petition was launched by the CSNA in reaction to Section 20 of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill which calls for structural separation of alcohol in stores of all sizes.
- Amendments tabled by Minister Harris will only help 5% of stores, leaving hundreds of small and medium sized mixed trade retailers under threat.
- There has been no consultation from the sector on Section 20 of the Bill, and no response from Minister for Health Simon Harris or the Department of Health regarding CSNA's concerns.
- The CSNA wants the government not to pass the Bill as it stands and to implement amendments laid out by Fianna Fail Senator Keith Swanick.
- The results of the petition were presented to Fine Gael Senator Michelle Mulherin outside Leinster House this morning\*.

*\*Photographs available later today upon request, please contact Claire on 087 9433517*

A petition organized by the Convenience Stores and Newsagents Association of Ireland (CSNA) which represents over 1500 retailers nationwide **has gathered over 80,000** from customers asking for amendments to be made to Section 20 of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill, which states that all mixed trade stores must visually separate alcohol from other goods, either behind a cabinet or in a separate room.

The CSNA are calling on all Senators and TDs not to allow the bill to pass as it is currently drafted, and to consider implementing amendments proposed by Senator Keith Swanick which remove this provision. The Bill is due to be appear this afternoon before Seanad Eireann, almost one year since it was last discussed.

Minister Harris last week published amendments that state that small stores will now be allowed to have two small units (with a combined storage capacity of no more than one cubic metre and a depth of no more than 25cm) to display alcohol. However, these amendments do not go far enough to protect the majority of stores in Ireland. CEO of the CSNA Vincent Jennings said ***"The new amendments will only be of help to less than 5% of retail outlets in Ireland. This proposal does not cover the needs of a huge proportion of the small and medium sized retail sector who must still create a separate space for alcohol in their stores"***

Mr Jennings continued ***"So far our sector has not been approached for consultation on the provisions laid out in Section 20 of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill by the Department, this is unacceptable. The amendments laid out by Minister Harris were released less than a week in advance of the Bill's reappearance, we have been completely blindsided by this."***

***"The response from our members and from the public has been huge, the results of the petition clearly show that. The fact is that our concerns as small and medium sized retailers in the country - a sector that employs 50,000 people in Ireland - have not been considered here."***

The CSNA have expressed that they would like to see amendments tabled by Senator Keith Swanick, which they consider to be compromise amendments. Rather than see complete visual separation,

alcohol would be separated by means of a physical barrier (such as a turn-style), but will not require complete removal of the product from public view.

Mr Jennings continued ***“We do not wish to tear down this bill, our only objection is to the current provision of the bill that requires the removal of visibility of alcohol products in our stores. I hope that the significant number of signatures we have collected will encourage the Minister Harris to take this seriously and to be open to a discussion on this extremely important matter.”***

*“The public were left in the dark with the Government’s amendments for far too long, and so were the CSNA. As representatives of 1,500 businesses that this will affect both physically and financially, this is extremely worrying to me and to our members.”*

**For more information please contact:**

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**Notes to editors:**

The Convenience Stores and Newsagents Association is the representative group for more than 1,500 retailers throughout the Republic of Ireland.

Within their membership, the CSNA represents independent franchisees of all symbol groups, owners and operators of service stations and independent CTN (confectionery, tobacconist and newsagents) shops.