



Carroll County Times: Letter to the Editor

January 15, 2010

Dear Editor,

I read with interest the story on Thursday, January 14 “Delegates Weigh Liquor Tax.” The story did an excellent job of presenting the views of the legislators, but there is another perspective that was not presented. There is a human side, one that affects thousands of real people each and every day.

The proposed legislation would increase the tax on alcohol with a portion of the proceeds designated to providing support services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. There are thousands of people statewide, including about 600 here in Carroll County, who are on a waiting list to receive funding for services that will provide them with daily living support, respite care and other direct care services. Many have been on the waiting list for years, and may never see the support they need. In addition, many of those who are receiving services are not receiving the full spectrum of services they need due to lack of funding. The reality is that the system that provides for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities is fragile and stressed to the breaking point, and real people are falling through the cracks.

Senator Kittleman’s statement that the tax is about temperance could not be farther from the truth. The tax is not, and never has been, about legislating consumers into reducing the amount of alcohol they consume or being more responsible in their use of alcohol. It is a use tax designed to tax a lifestyle choice that is a known contributor to intellectual and developmental disabilities such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

We understand that the alcohol and hospitality industries are suffering during this economic crisis. People with disabilities are suffering too. Those who are fortunate enough to be receiving services live in fear each day that their services will be reduced or cut altogether due to lack of funds. Non-profit community service providers, such as The Arc, are struggling to continue to provide services to people despite the fact that they are underfunded or unfunded by the state. With another massive budget deficit facing Maryland, The Arc and other organizations like it in Carroll County are bracing for another round of budget cuts that may leave little choice but to reduce services, beginning with those that are unfunded or underfunded.

Tax increases are never popular, especially during election years. But, the alcohol and restaurant industries are likely to pass the tax on to consumers, who are indicating that they would support the increase. A 2009 survey found that 83% of Marylanders would support an alcohol tax increase if the proceeds were designated to increasing funding for disabilities and other alcohol related health initiatives.

We live in a time when we as a community rush to the aid of victims of earthquakes, tsunamis and hurricanes and ask what more can we do to help, yet refuse to mobilize when members of our own community are unable to get the support services they need to live fulfilling and meaningful lives.

We had hoped that lawmakers would be courageous enough to recognize that the basic living needs of the disabilities population was important enough to warrant the first increase in the alcohol tax in nearly a half-century. Maybe they need some persuading.

I encourage everyone to contact their legislators and let them know how you feel about this issue. There could come a day when you or a loved one could need the services of The Arc or another community service provider like it. Wouldn't you like to know that the extra dime you paid for your beer or glass of wine will ensure that you're not going to be denied the services you need because the tap is dry?

Donald Rowe,

Executive Director

The Arc of Carroll County