Grocery and Convenience Stores’ Beer and Wine Sales: A Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

Today, Governor Wolf ordered the mandatory shutdown of all non-essential businesses, which includes casinos, bars, shopping malls, Pennsylvania Fine Wine and Good Spirits, and restaurants, although restaurants can stay open to offer only carry-out and delivery. Grocery stores, pharmacies, and gas stations remain essential businesses that are allowed to remain open during this current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Beer and Wine Sales in Pennsylvania

In Pennsylvania, grocery stores began selling beer several years ago and, more recently, wine. Grocery stores obtain a retail restaurant liquor license and Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board rules require grocery stores to have a segregated area were restaurants must comply with certain requirements under the Liquor Code. One of these rules mandates having food available for on-premise consumption while they are selling alcohol. So, the Governor of Pennsylvania has ordered the closure of restaurants except for takeout or delivery yet permitted grocery stores to remain open.

Where Does the Coronavirus Leave Restaurants Operating in Convenience and Grocery Stores?

This author has had the opportunity to interact with the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board and local Pennsylvania State Police Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement and has been advised by PSP-BLCE that their current coronavirus policy will allow any restaurants, including those operating within a grocery store or a convenience store, to sell beer-to-go along with food offerings to go. The restaurants will not be permitted to seat consumers for on-premise food or alcohol consumption.

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