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Baltimore County task force to study liquor license law

Kamenetz seeks to tap economic windfall of surge in restaurant dining

By Kevin Rector, krector@tribune.com

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With an eye toward tapping the potential economic windfall of Americans eating out at restaurants more than ever before, Baltimore County Executive Kevin Kamenetz announced on Thursday, Aug. 4, that he has formed a 12-person task force to study how liquor licenses are distributed to restaurants in the county and around the state.

"The county executive is well aware of the changing lifestyle of Americans," said Don Mohler, Kamenetz's chief of staff. "We know that restaurants can have significant economic impact in an area, in a region, and one of the things that many restaurants need to be viable is a liquor license."

Kamenetz's announcement cited a December study by business advisory firm Alixpartners that found 57 percent of Americans surveyed will eat out at least once a week in 2011, an increase of 8 percent compared to another survey by the company in March 2010. (The National Restaurants Association has painted a less rosy picture in more recent months.)

The goal of the task force will be to assess possible changes to the state's liquor licensing law that would encourage economic development through the creation of more restaurants in the county, Mohler said.

An employee at the county's Liquor Board office said there are currently a total of 751 liquor licenses held in the county, with about 305 of those held by restaurants.

The task force will deliver a report of their findings to Kamenetz by Nov. 15, leaving "plenty of time of us to present legislation to the General Assembly in January," Mohler said.

What that legislation will recommend depends on what the task force finds, Mohler said.

Kamenetz "will decide what the next steps are basd upon the review," Mohler said.

Mohler said the study will focus specifically on liquor licenses for restaurants, not for bars or packaged good stores, but will affect "small restauranteurs as well as large national chains."

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"This is purely focusing on the restaurant segment of the economy, which is clearly becoming more and more important each and every day," Mohler said.

Mohler said those named to the task force have "broad experience with the restaurant industry, with the issue of liquor licenses."

The task force is co-chaired by Dan Gundersen, executive director of the county's Department of Economic Development, and Mike Mohler, chief administrator of the Baltimore County Liquor Board.

The task force also includes:

- ¿ Arthur Adler, Caves Valleys Partners
- ¿ Teal Cary, Catonsville Chamber of Commerce
- ¿ Edward Gilliss, Baltimore County Planning Board
- ¿ Jack Milani, Baltimore County Licensed Beverage Association
- ¿ David Mister, Mister, Winter & Bartlett LLC
- ¿ Damian O'Doherty, KO Public Affairs
- ¿ Harold Reid, Liberty Road Business Association
- ¿ Jose Rivas, Central Realty
- ¿ Keith Scott, Baltimore County Chamber of Commerce
- ¿ Melvin Thompson, Restaurant Association of Maryland

The task force's first meeting, which is open to the public, is Thursday, Aug. 18, at 10 a.m. in Room 118 of the Historic Courthouse in Towson.