

## Pro-growth reforms can keep state beer economy hopping

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By Rick Plesz and Bob Smith

For more than a year, Michigan's craft brewers and family owned distributors have collaborated and cooperated to find new ways to grow this state's beer industry. In the spirit of compromise, we have found common ground and agreed on reforms to take Michigan's successful beer economy to the next level.

Now, it is up to the Legislature to approve these reforms. They will promote economic growth and market expansion while ensuring they happen in a responsible, balanced way.

These reforms will usher in the next new chapter of Michigan's craft beer story and preserve a pro-growth system that made us the nation's fifth-largest craft beer state, with double digit expansion that far outpaces the U.S. average.

In the 1990s, Michigan's beer industry still was in its infancy. A few small brewers were around, pushing the limits of what innovative beer could be.

The Rochester Mills Beer Co. was one of those pioneers — and to this day, it constantly works hard to enter new markets with new products.

In March 2013, Rochester Mills partnered with Earl Smith Distributing Co. of Port Huron. Tap takeovers to promote Rochester Mills led to growing brand awareness. That led to trade shows and more exposure. Today, Rochester Mills is a Michigan craft beer with a solid following and a bright future in the Thumb.

Now Michigan's beer sector — supporting thousands of local jobs and hundreds of Michigan businesses — has a chance to step up its game with legislative passage of a 10-bill bipartisan package of reforms. These reforms have the potential to benefit businesses involved in beer and, more broadly, hospitality and tourism.

These proposals will ensure Michigan businesses can compete on a fair and level playing field and expand their access to new markets.

To help small start-up brewers, these reforms will allow them to deliver their beers directly to retailers.

By redefining Michigan microbrewers and brew pubs, these reforms will help successful higher-volume producers grow their businesses, expand their operations and create more jobs.

To help local businesses that play by the rules, the proposals will speed up the licensing process and eliminate red tape.

To address concerns among bars and restaurants that have long wanted to buy glassware with logos, the proposals will now allow them to purchase these items from independent third parties.

We embraced key recommendations in Gov. Rick Snyder's report to update alcohol regulations. These reforms will keep Michigan's local beer sector hopping and deserve legislative approval. Good beer, like good reforms, shouldn't sit around too long.

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