



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on December 17, 2017

Philadelphia City Council Takes a Shot at Small Stores' Bulletproof Glass

In an effort to crack down on so-called beer delis, the Philadelphia city council [passed](#) a measure that could prevent business owners from protecting themselves with bulletproof glass.



On Thursday, the council voted 14-3 to pass the legislation, which is aimed at regulating certain businesses in poor neighborhoods. These “beer delis” offer bottles of beer to go, shots of liquor to consume on the premises, and food. They are also accused of being frequent sites of public urination, selling cigarettes to children, hawking drug paraphernalia, and serving as gathering places for dealers in illegal drugs.

Liquor is regulated by the state of Pennsylvania, so the city can't do anything about the stores' booze sales. But since the stores also claim to be restaurants, the council is trying to regulate them as such. The bill passed Thursday creates new restaurant licenses for establishments with fewer than 30 seats, limits what such businesses can sell, and mandates that they maintain public restrooms that do not require patrons to pass through restricted areas.

Whether or not one agrees with these measures, they at least are germane to curbing beer delis' alleged nuisance activities. One provision in the bill, however, is not. It requires Philadelphia's Department of Licenses and Inspections to issue new regulations on the “use or removal of physical barriers,” specifically bulletproof-glass panels used to separate patrons from cashiers and servers. The original bill actually banned the barriers outright, but after store owners raised a ruckus about it, it was watered down to a demand for regulations that do not even have to be promulgated until 2021.

Why the concern over bulletproof glass, which obviously exists to protect store employees from criminals? Apparently, patronizing an establishment that seeks to separate employees from customers makes some people feel bad.

“Right now, the Plexiglas has to come down,” Councilwoman Cindy Bass told television station [WTXF](#).

“We want to make sure that there isn't this sort of indignity, in my opinion, to serving food through a Plexiglas only in certain neighborhoods,” she explained.

There is, of course, a reason that proprietors in certain neighborhoods feel the need for such barriers, observed *Reason's* [Ed Krayewski](#): “Speaking from personal experience as a resident of Philadelphia, the presence of bulletproof glass correlates well with the places where the city already deploys more police officers and mobile units.”

In other words, store owners in high-crime areas do not want to be robbed or murdered, so they put up bulletproof-glass barriers. Undoubtedly this makes some patrons feel uncomfortable; perhaps they even



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believe they are being treated as criminals. But forcing shopkeepers to expose themselves to life-threatening risks to spare the feelings of some of their customers is hardly the solution to this conundrum.

Ironically, in its effort to make certain minorities — namely, African-Americans — feel better, the council is endangering another minority, Asian-Americans. “Many of the 230 Asian beer deli owners feel as though they are being singled out,” reported WTXF, and they turned out in force to oppose the legislation.

Rich Kim, whose family has run Broad Deli for 20 years, “says the glass went up after a shooting and claims it saved his mother-in-law from a knife attack,” wrote WTXF. “If the glass comes down, the crime rate will rise and there will be lots of dead bodies,” asserted Kim.

Another store owner told the council he had been the victim of a robbery at age 10, “and I don’t want that to happen again.”

Councilman David Oh argued that banning glass barriers would endanger both store employees and the general public. “If we take down the safety glass,” he said, “they’re not changing their business model. They’re not moving. What they will do is purchase firearms. I think that is a worse situation than what we have today.”

It’s possible that the regulations may never go into effect. State Representative Todd Stephens (R) has [introduced](#) legislation prohibiting municipalities from interfering in certain workplace-safety decisions.

“No employer,” Stephens wrote in a memo to his colleagues, “wants their employees to be injured or killed as a result of workplace violence, and it’s absurd that any municipality would want to prevent employers from taking steps to prevent and protect their employees.”

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