

TESTIMONY
Pennsylvania Senate Committee on Local Government
June 23rd, 2017

Jose Espinal
Good Neighbor Mini Market
4837 Woodland Avenue
Philadelphia

Good morning, Chairman Wagner, Senator Williams, and the members of the Committee on Local Government.

My name is Jose Espinal, and I am a resident of the Southwest section of Philadelphia, in Senator Williams' district.

I own the Good Neighbor Mini Market in Philadelphia, which is located at 4837 Woodland Avenue. I have been in business at this location for the past 15 years and employ 5 people.

I want to talk to you today about the soda and drinks tax in Philadelphia. It is really hurting all of us. Sales in my store are down 15 to 20 percent since the tax was imposed. Because of this, I have had to cut back.

This tax hurts everybody it touches— my business, my family, and my community.

First of all, this tax hurts my relationship with my customers. A lot of them don't know I'm not responsible for having to charge them extra, but my costs have gone way up and I have no choice.

This tax is not just impacting our beverage sales, it is also hurting the sales of everything our customers typically purchase. Before the tax, our customers were purchasing beverages along with milk, eggs, coffee, sandwiches, and snack items. Now, our customers are taking their business outside the City, and purchasing these items at a different store. This tax is simply not sustainable for our business or our City.

A lot of kids in the neighborhood come into my store to buy something after school. It's summertime now, and it's natural for kids to want a soda, but a lot of them can't afford it anymore because of the tax.

Since January, I find I'm making less money, but my taxes remain high. This tax just adds another expense that I can't afford, either.

This tax is hurting Philadelphia, inside the city — and it's hurting storeowners like me. And it hurts the people and the neighborhood where my store is. The people who live near my store are not rich. They can't afford this tax. Groceries are expensive enough already!

The poverty rate in Philadelphia is over 25%. We are the poorest big city in America. This tax is hurting Philadelphia by hurting our small businesses, the same small businesses that employ people from our neighborhoods.

I am asking for your help in finding a solution other than this painful tax. A fair solution that does not target one sector of our City's businesses. A solution that can allow my business to continue to grow and prosper, and to continue to provide jobs to the people and families who live in our community.

I ask you: is this fair? I don't think it is. My customers don't think this tax is fair, either.

Thank you for giving me time to tell my story. I can answer any questions you may have about my store.