

New York: Cuomo opposes grocery wine sales

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For the first time, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said Thursday he opposes the sale of wine in grocery stores.

State legislators are split on the controversial proposal and Cuomo previously signaled his resistance to the idea. His 2011-12 budget, adopted earlier this year, omitted it.

But the governor hadn't specifically voiced his opposition before, aides acknowledged. In fact, Cuomo dodged a question about the issue in September when he held his first online chat with New York residents.

"Nothing has changed. I'm not supporting" wine sales in grocery stores, Cuomo told reporters Thursday.

Many New York wineries have lobbied for years to repeal a law that limits wine sales to liquor stores. Expanding into grocery stores could greatly boost sales, they argue, perhaps by \$70 million annually.

Some Long Islanders were taken aback by Cuomo's declaration.

Ron Goerler Jr., president of the Long Island Wine Council and owner of Jamesport Vineyards, said that while his council is neutral on the issue and his company had no plans for supermarket sales, "I'm surprised the governor would come out against it, especially in this economy.

"But the governor sees both sides and he has to make the call," Goerler said.

Relatively small wine producers, including many on Long Island, don't have the volume or the low price points to make wine a success in grocery stores, Goerler said. "Only a handful" of Long Island producers could benefit from supermarket sales, he added.

Former Gov. David A. Paterson made a strong push to allow grocery stores to carry wine. But his proposal failed to gain enough traction with legislators.

Opponents say it would put more than 1,000 small liquor stores out of

business -- and help big box stores without benefiting consumers. The head of their lobbying group, Last Store on Main Street Coalition, applauded Cuomo's stance.

"The governor knows that this dangerous idea would kill thousands of jobs by putting mom-and-pop shops across upstate New York out of business," Jeff Saunders, who owns a liquor store in Manhattan, said in a statement.