

# Montgomery to sell liquor on Sundays

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November 8, 2010

Montgomery County residents for the first time will be allowed to buy alcohol on Sundays.

County Executive Ike Leggett issued an executive order -- expected to be finalized Wednesday -- that would open the county's liquor stores on Sundays, The Washington Examiner has learned.

"It's going to happen; I can tell you that," county spokeswoman Donna Bigler said. "We're looking at implementing it for all the stores and plan to roll it out in late November."

In the tightly regulated county, spirits such as tequila, whiskey and vodka can be bought only at county-owned liquor stores.

County officials who have seen Leggett's plan say it will be introduced as a six-month trial. The arrangement would allow the county to capitalize on higher-than-normal liquor sales around the holidays and ensure the setup produces a profit.

"I'm glad we're doing this," said Councilman Marc Elrich, D-at large. We should have done it a long time ago. What's the downside?"

But some say Sundays should be reserved for worship and family time, while others argue that it will hurt restaurants and privately operated beer and wine stores.

"Did you consider the hardship this will cause these small business owners in the form of decreased sales on the one day they don't have to compete with the hand that feeds them?" Lewis Gertz of Germantown wrote county officials.

The county also acts as a distributor to restaurants and private stores that sell beer and wine, an arrangement that has filled county coffers with more than \$200 million over the last decade.

Earlier this year, Councilman Mike Knapp, D-Germantown, estimated the county would make an additional \$1.5 million to \$2 million a year by opening its 24 liquor stores on Sundays.

But some argue it would merely change routines rather than provide a boon to the county's bottom line.

"I'm skeptical of the plan," said Councilman George Leventhal, D-at large. "Very few people buy hard liquor every day. If they buy it on Sunday, they won't buy it on Thursday."

The County Council does not have to approve the measure because the Department of Liquor Control falls squarely under Leggett's command.