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Another Success for Restaurant Industry in Final Hour of Maryland General Assembly Session

Restaurant Association of Maryland and Industry Partners Successfully Repeal Soda Fountain License Fee

(Annapolis, MD) Last week, in the final hour of the Maryland General Assembly, operators across the state celebrated the closing of the 2009 legislative session with yet another win for the hospitality industry. The Restaurant Association of Maryland, along with its devoted members and industry affiliates, repealed the imposition of a soda fountain license fee through their unified support of House Bill 1573 which would eradicate the obsolete and unnecessary expense outlined in the 1916 Law of Maryland (Chapter 704).

The original 1916 Law of Maryland (Chapter 704) stated that each person, firm or corporation operating a soda fountain in the state of Maryland must take out a license and pay an annual license fee of \$6.00 for each fountain operated in the city of Baltimore and throughout Maryland's county jurisdictions. Code revisions over the years increased the fee to \$60 in Baltimore City and \$25 elsewhere in the state. In a March 2009 memorandum to local circuit court clerks, the Comptroller directed local license authorities to revive this fee for any business operating a soda fountain device.

"The repeal of the soda fountain license fee is a great win for restaurants and retailers. Normally, it is a challenge to get a bill passed this late in the legislative session. However, the bill's sponsor, Delegate Nick Kipke (R-31, Anne Arundel), worked closely with the industry and fellow lawmakers to insure that House Bill 1573 passed before the legislature adjourned" commented Melvin Thompson, Senior Vice President of Government Affairs for the Restaurant Association of Maryland.

Given that nearly all businesses with soda fountains must now obtain locally-issued foodservice facility licenses, the 1916 soda fountain license law is unnecessary. The additional expense would only overlap with current operator fees that already cover the operation of equipment in their establishments. While House Bill 1573 has an effective date of October 2009, the Restaurant Association of Maryland reports that the Comptroller's Office of Maryland has no intention of enforcing the old law before the repeal legislation takes effect.

This most recent repeal is one of many successes this legislative session for the hospitality industry and the Restaurant Association of Maryland. Both have been instrumental in defeating many pieces of misguided legislation that would have negatively impacted the hospitality industry in Maryland during critical economic times. The industry was successful in its defeat of House Bill 16, sponsored by Delegate Roger Manno (D-19, Montgomery), which would have required a mandatory 15-minute shift break for all employees who work more than four consecutive hours and a 30-minute break for all employees who work more than six consecutive hours. This proposal would have exempted

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employers with fewer than 50 employees. The Association was also recently successful in defeating House Bill 601 which would have required chain restaurants to disclose nutrition information on menus. For further details on the information mentioned please contact the Restaurant Association of Maryland directly at 410.290.6800 or visit www.marylandrestaurants.com/laws.

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The Restaurant Association of Maryland (RAM) has remained relevant to restaurateurs for over 80 years by maintaining core principles born out of the first national financial crisis. In 1927 a small group of Baltimore area restaurateurs met to deal with the challenges facing the economy and the foodservice industry. Today, RAM is a 2,000 member strong statewide trade association operated for the purpose of promoting, protecting and improving the foodservice industry in the State of Maryland. Since the very beginning, the Association has been run by restaurateurs and suppliers working not only for the benefit of dues paying members, but also for the restaurant industry as a whole. For more information about the restaurant industry in Maryland please visit our website at www.marylandrestaurants.com.