



Oppose Rest Area Commercialization

Congress Must Preserve Opportunities for Blind Entrepreneurs at Interstate Rest Areas.

Today, state agencies for the blind provide vending services to travelers who take safety breaks at approximately 1,100 interstate rest areas primarily through businesses owned and operated by blind entrepreneurs. This number represents approximately one-third of the vending facilities operated nationwide through the Randolph-Sheppard Program. In 1982, Congress stipulated that businesses owned and operated by blind entrepreneurs have a priority to operate vending machines at interstate rest areas.¹ These vending machines, which enable many blind entrepreneurs to earn a living, provide for their families, and contribute as tax-paying citizens, are the only commercial activities allowed to take place at most rest areas throughout the country.

Previous efforts to commercialize rest areas have failed because Congress recognized that allowing such activities would hurt blind entrepreneurs. In addition to threatening the livelihood of blind entrepreneurs, rest stop commercialization would also have a negative impact on local communities and businesses. This fundamental reality has not changed. Supporters of rest stop commercialization argue that doing so will generate new revenue, but this is not the case. Rest stop commercialization will simply redirect revenue from cash-strapped municipalities located adjacent to Interstate highways into state coffers.²

The current administration has included rest stop commercialization as part of its broader infrastructure plan, and now Congress is being asked to reexamine the prohibition on commercializing rest areas. However, the costs to such actions would be devastating to blind entrepreneurs as well as off-highway travel centers, convenience stores, and restaurants located at the interstate exits. Local governments who rely on tax revenue from these businesses would suffer as well, as decreased business would result in reduced taxes collected.

Commercialization would almost immediately displace blind entrepreneurs who service vending machines at the interstate rest areas. These individuals will lose their livelihoods and many will be forced to rely on government assistance. This would be devastating to the Randolph-Sheppard Program nationwide and the viability of some state vocational rehabilitation programs will also be at risk.

**OPPOSE ANY EFFORTS TO ALLOW COMMERCIALIZATION OF
INTERSTATE REST AREAS**

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¹ 23 U.S.C. § 111(c)

² Courtney, Shaun. "Rest Stop Privatization More About Ideology Than Infrastructure." National Association of Truck Stop Operators. February 22, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.natso.com/articles/articles/view/rest-stop-privatization-more-about-ideology-than-infrastructure-3>.