



City of Cambridge

50.

IN CITY COUNCIL

March 17, 1997

COUNCILLOR DAVIS
 VICE MAYOR BORN
 COUNCILLOR DUEHAY
 COUNCILLOR GALLUCCIO
 MAYOR RUSSELL
 COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN
 COUNCILLOR TOOMEY
 COUNCILLOR TRIANTAFILLOU

WHEREAS: Considerable press attention has focused this past week on the grocery industry legislative effort to gain legislative approval of the testing of electronic shelf pricing in supermarkets only if those markets are exempted from the current law requiring item pricing stickers on grocery goods; and

WHEREAS: The recent supermarket survey promoted on-line by the Cambridge consumer council and statewide by the Massachusetts Consumers Coalition shows that 78% of Massachusetts consumers still want item pricing; and

WHEREAS: The survey also found that 86% were willing to try electronic shelf tags if and only if item pricing stickers remained; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council go on record in support of the retention of item pricing in Massachusetts and request that the Committee on Commerce and Labor report out unfavorably on the recent bills designed to erode or eliminate item pricing and inform the full Cambridge delegation on this matter; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Clerk be and hereby is requested to forward a suitably engrossed copy of this resolution to Cambridge legislative delegation on behalf of the entire City Council.

In City Council March 17, 1997

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

D. Margaret Drury
 City Clerk

D. Margaret Drury

MASSACHUSETTS CONSUMERS' COALITION

#50

c/o CAMBRIDGE CONSUMERS' COUNCIL, 831 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

AN ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE AGENCIES AFFILIATED TO PROMOTE CONSUMER INTERESTS

PAUL SCHLAVER, Chairman
Cambridge Consumers' Council
(617) 349-6152

JEANNE FOY, Secretary
MASSPIRG Consumer Action Center
(617) 335-0280

EDGAR DWORSKY, Treasurer
Consumer World
(617) 242-2425

JEAN COURTNEY, Vice Chair
Consumer Information Center
(413) 737-1230

For Release:
March 11, 1997

CONTACT:

Edgar Dworsky
(617) 242-2425

Paul Schlaver
(617) 349-6152
Deirdre Cummings
(617) 292-4800

CONSUMER SURVEY: SHOPPERS WANT PRICES TO STICK

Tomorrow, the supermarket industry will make its case at State House hearings for removing price tags from groceries and replacing them with electronic shelf labels, but a new survey released today says Massachusetts consumers overwhelmingly want to stick with individual prices.

The survey, conducted among over 1600 consumers statewide during November, December and January by the Massachusetts Consumers' Coalition, a network of state and local consumer groups, revealed that nearly four out of five consumers (78%) disapprove of a proposal to do away with individual price marking.

Under the proposed law, individual price stickers would be eliminated, and electronic shelf labels would replace the current paper orange and white unit price shelf labels which display both the price and price per measure of grocery items. The electronic tags would be connected to the same computer which operates the checkout scanner, so the price at the shelf will always match the price at the register.

"Consumers prefer to look at the item itself to determine the price, rather than to an often missing or misplaced shelf tag," commented Coalition Chairman Paul Schlaver. "With the price right on the item, consumers can easily spot which items are on sale, compare prices of items in their basket with those found in other parts of the store, total

their purchase as they shop, and make sure the price scanned is the price they expected to pay. Without item pricing, consumers would need a photographic memory."

What may come as a surprise to grocer industry officials who often characterize surveys conducted by consumer groups as biased, is that the shoppers questioned actually like the idea of electronic shelf tags. In fact, 86% of consumers would accept the substitution of electronic shelf tags for the current paper ones, as long as items continue to be individually price marked, as required by current state law.

The author of that law says that item pricing also helps prevent overcharging. "Remember how Osco Drug was caught overcharging on groceries last year?" queried former Assistant Attorney General Edgar Dworsky. "The only way Boston inspectors knew that Osco had programmed the wrong prices into their computer scanner was because the right prices were marked on the items. If no prices had been marked, neither consumers nor weights and measures officials would have ever caught the overcharges."

"It is preposterous that the grocery industry would even think of rolling back the item pricing law -- the most effective tool consumers can use to ensure that they are not getting ripped off at the register," commented MASSPIRG consumer program director Deirdre Cummings. "Instead, they should be working to improve checkout accuracy."

Other results of the survey included:

-- Only 19% would prefer their regular supermarket to have electronic shelf tags without individual item pricing

-- 86% said it was "very important" or "somewhat important" to have individual pricing

-- Two-thirds of shoppers rely on the sticker on the item to determine the price

Hearings on two electronic shelf tag bills will be held tomorrow at 1 p.m. before the Joint Committee on Commerce and Labor in room B1 at the State House.

###

① Whereas considerable press attention has focused this past week on the grocery industry legislative effort to gain legislative approval of the testing of electronic shelf pricing in supermarkets only if most mkt's are exempted from the current law requiring item pricing stickers on grocery goods

② Whereas the recent supermarket survey promoted on-line by the Camb. Consumer Council + statewide by the Mass. Consumers Coalition shows that 78% of Mass consumers still want item pricing

③ ~~Whereas~~ Whereas the survey also found that 86% were willing to try electronic shelf tags if and only if item pricing stickers remained

Wherefore be it resolved that the City Council go on record in support of the retention of item pricing in Mass + request that the Committee on Commerce + Labor report out unfavorably on the recent bills designed to erode or eliminate item pricing. And inform the full Camb delegation on this matter

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
STEERING COMMITTEE
AGENDA FOR 3/13/97

- **Welcome & Introductions**
- **Discussion with Commissioner Watson**

- **Agenda Planning**

April—E.C.C.

May—Crime Stats Presentation

June—Youth Conference???

Graffiti Clean-Up, Park Hours & Use, Kelling Follow-up, Future Conferences & Training, Noise, ????

- **Unfinished Business & Referral**

Next Steps for Actions & Solutions on Status of Neighborhood Organizations

- **Report from Neighborhood Coordinator**

- **Committee Reports**

Treasurer's Report

Meetings & Events

Communication & Membership

Cambridge After Hours

MASSACHUSETTS CONSUMERS' COALITION

#50

c/o CAMBRIDGE CONSUMERS' COUNCIL, 831 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

AN ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE AGENCIES AFFILIATED TO PROMOTE CONSUMER INTERESTS

PAUL SCHLAVER, Chairman
Cambridge Consumers' Council
(617) 349-6152

JEANNE FOY, Secretary
MASSPIRG Consumer Action Center
(617) 335-0280

EDGAR DWORSKY, Treasurer
Consumer World
(617) 242-2425

JEAN COURTNEY, Vice Chair
Consumer Information Center
(413) 737-1230

For Release:
March 11, 1997

CONTACT: Paul Schlaver
(617) 349-6152
Edgar Dworsky Deirdre Cummings
(617) 242-2425 (617) 292-4800

CONSUMER SURVEY: SHOPPERS WANT PRICES TO STICK

Tomorrow, the supermarket industry will make its case at State House hearings for removing price tags from groceries and replacing them with electronic shelf labels, but a new survey released today says Massachusetts consumers overwhelmingly want to stick with individual prices.

The survey, conducted among over 1600 consumers statewide during November, December and January by the Massachusetts Consumers' Coalition, a network of state and local consumer groups, revealed that nearly four out of five consumers (78%) disapprove of a proposal to do away with individual price marking.

Under the proposed law, individual price stickers would be eliminated, and electronic shelf labels would replace the current paper orange and white unit price shelf labels which display both the price and price per measure of grocery items. The electronic tags would be connected to the same computer which operates the checkout scanner, so the price at the shelf will always match the price at the register.

"Consumers prefer to look at the item itself to determine the price, rather than to an often missing or misplaced shelf tag," commented Coalition Chairman Paul Schlaver. "With the price right on the item, consumers can easily spot which items are on sale, compare prices of items in their basket with those found in other parts of the store, total

their purchase as they shop, and make sure the price scanned is the price they expected to pay. Without item pricing, consumers would need a photographic memory."

What may come as a surprise to grocer industry officials who often characterize surveys conducted by consumer groups as biased, is that the shoppers questioned actually like the idea of electronic shelf tags. In fact, 86% of consumers would accept the substitution of electronic shelf tags for the current paper ones, as long as items continue to be individually price marked, as required by current state law.

The author of that law says that item pricing also helps prevent overcharging. "Remember how Osco Drug was caught overcharging on groceries last year?" queried former Assistant Attorney General Edgar Dworsky. "The only way Boston inspectors knew that Osco had programmed the wrong prices into their computer scanner was because the right prices were marked on the items. If no prices had been marked, neither consumers nor weights and measures officials would have ever caught the overcharges."

"It is preposterous that the grocery industry would even think of rolling back the item pricing law -- the most effective tool consumers can use to ensure that they are not getting ripped off at the register," commented MASSPIRG consumer program director Deirdre Cummings. "Instead, they should be working to improve checkout accuracy."

Other results of the survey included:

-- Only 19% would prefer their regular supermarket to have electronic shelf tags without individual item pricing

-- 86% said it was "very important" or "somewhat important" to have individual pricing

-- Two-thirds of shoppers rely on the sticker on the item to determine the price

Hearings on two electronic shelf tag bills will be held tomorrow at 1 p.m. before the Joint Committee on Commerce and Labor in room B1 at the State House.

###

SUPERMARKET SURVEY

(1633 Respondents -- Nov., Dec., 1996, Jan. 97)

1. What is the *primary* way you determine the price of a particular grocery item you are about to put into your shopping cart? (Pick one answer only)

67% price sticker on the item 23% the label on the shelf 1% a store sign
6% advertisement 3% I don't check the price first

2. Some supermarkets are considering installing *electronic shelf pricing labels*. (These are small electronic panels on the grocery shelf that would display the price and the price per ounce, much like numbers on a digital watch, only larger. These electronic shelf labels get their pricing information from the same computer that operates the cash register scanner, so the price you see on the shelf is the price you will pay at the register.)

If stores install these electronic shelf tags, they want to *stop* marking individual prices right on the item, as is currently required by state law.

Do you 22% APPROVE or 78% DISAPPROVE of removing individual prices?

3. Which would you prefer your regular supermarket to have:

81% individual price marking on the item and the current paper shelf price labels; or
19% the proposed electronic shelf labels and no individual price stickers on items

4. As an alternative, if your regular supermarket installed electronic shelf tags but also continued to place individual price stickers on items, would you:

86% approve or 14% disapprove

5. How important is it to you to have grocery items individually priced marked?

67% very important
19% somewhat important
9% not very important
5% not important at all

COMMENTS:

Thanks for participating. Please return this survey to: Mass. Consumers. Coalition



City of Cambridge

50.

IN CITY COUNCIL

March 17, 1997

COUNCILLOR DAVIS

- WHEREAS: Considerable press attention has focused this past week on the grocery industry legislative effort to gain legislative approval of the testing of electronic shelf pricing in supermarkets only if those markets are exempted from the current law requiring item pricing stickers on grocery goods; and
- WHEREAS: The recent supermarket survey promoted on-line by the Cambridge consumer council and statewide by the Massachusetts Consumers Coalition shows that 78% of Massachusetts consumers still want item pricing; and
- WHEREAS: The survey also found that 86% were willing to try electronic shelf tags if and only if item pricing stickers remained; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED: That the City Council go on record in support of the retention of item pricing in Massachusetts and request that the Committee on Commerce and Labor report out unfavorably on the recent bills designed to erode or eliminate item pricing and inform the full Cambridge delegation on this matter; and be it further
- RESOLVED: That the City Clerk be and hereby is requested to forward a suitably engrossed copy of this resolution to Cambridge legislative delegation on behalf of the entire City Council.

Born, Dehay Gallucci, Russel
Consent Order #50
Sullivan, Toney Triantafyllou
Councillor Davis re: Support of the
retention of item pricing in Massachu-
setts.

5-135

In City Council March 17, 1997

ORDER ADOPTED