

OKLAHOMA SENATE DEFEATS BILL TO END CAPITOL VENDING For VISION IMPAIRED

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Through the Department of Rehabilitation Services, vision impaired entrepreneurs run two snack bars at the Capitol, but a bill proposed making the space available to private companies instead.

The state Senate defeated a bill termed “mean spirited” by one lawmaker that would have taken snack bar space in the state Capitol from a program intended for the vision impaired and put it up instead for free-market competition. “Our job is to protect the most vulnerable in society,” said Sen. Earl Garrison, D-Muskogee. There is no reason in the world to do it.”

House Bill 2119 passed the House with only one no vote, but was defeated in the Senate 15-27. Author of the bill, House Pro Tem Jeff Hickman, R-Fairview, said the service provided by the blind and vision-impaired vendors was not meeting the needs and demands of the busy Capitol. The bill would have exempted the Capitol from a state-adopted federal law that gives preference to vision-impaired vendors in state and county buildings with few exceptions, such as hospitals and golf courses.

It also stipulated, however, that proceeds from renting the spaces to private vendors would go to the Department of Rehabilitation Services to help fund programs like their Business Enterprise Program that trains vision-impaired clients to run their own vending stands in state and federal buildings.