

Korean merchants protest nuisance law

By Liz F. Kay

Baltimore Sun, September 24, 2008

Korean-Americans protested yesterday a city public nuisance law they feel unfairly targets their businesses, as a judge told the liquor board to review a case involving the first store closed by the rule.

In April, the city liquor board decided not to renew the license of Linden Bar and Liquors, in the 900 block of W. North Ave., after hearing community concerns over criminal activity in and around the business, including a homicide inside the store.

Yesterday, because of a procedural matter, a Baltimore Circuit Court judge instructed the board to review its decision not to renew Chang K. Yim's tavern license. The board must make a determination whether Yim is eligible for another type of liquor license, said Russell Neverdon, the liquor board's appeals counsel.

"If the board says this license shouldn't be renewed, they have to give some other type of license," Yim's attorney, Richard C. Bittner, said yesterday. The Linden's tavern license gave it maximum privileges.

But Councilman William H. Cole IV, who represents that area, said, "The facts haven't changed at all. The original facts still remain. They couldn't keep the inside of their establishment safe for their customers."

Last month, Yim received a "padlock notice" shutting down the shop for at least six months under a revised public nuisance law after nine incidents of violence and drug activity were reported there. He has protested in opposition to the law.

"They are not doing any illegal thing," Inwook Ben Hur, president of the Korean Society of Maryland, said yesterday at the protest outside City Hall. He called the punishment "the death penalty" for small businesses.

"We wanted to let people know it's not wrong to be a merchant of a small business," said David Han, past president of the society.

The business owners, carrying signs reading "Padlock the Padlock Law" and "Padlock Law is unconstitutional," feel threatened by this city action, he said.

"We should not be blamed for criminal activity. We are not the cause of criminal acts," he said.