

# Blue laws essay sample



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Faced with that ominous threat, managers of Whole Foods Markets quickly dropped advertised plans to open their 16 stores in Massachusetts on Thanksgiving. Last-minute shoppers searching for trimmings were out of luck. So were employees who wanted a chance to earn double pay. (Related: Opposing view) The natural-foods grocery chain could have faced criminal penalties for running afoul of the state's laws that bar most commercial activity on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Massachusetts Attorney General Tom Reilly issued his warning after Shaw's Supermarkets, a competing chain, complained about Whole Foods' planned opening. Police in Quincy also ordered a Super 88 Market store to close.

“Blue laws” (the term's origin is a matter of historical dispute) banning commerce on Sundays and holidays were inspired by the Puritans. They landed in Massachusetts in the 1600s and operated under a philosophy of “honor the Sabbath — or else!” Travel was forbidden on Sundays. So was using a broom or engaging in work. Attire was strictly regulated, and missing church was forbidden. Whipping was a common punishment. Attitudes have relaxed during the past four centuries, and punishment for violators isn't as Puritanical these days. Even so, blue law prohibitions on Sunday commerce and activities exist in some form in 17 states and hundreds of communities across the nation. The laws make little sense these days.

Governments shouldn't impose what is essentially a religious observance or ban otherwise legal behavior. New Jersey's original blue law was called the Vice and Immorality Act. State and local ordinances refer to the “moral debasement” that occurs from working on the Sabbath. Moreover, the laws are wildly confusing. In Massachusetts, grocery stores must close on

Thanksgiving and Christmas, but convenience stores selling the same goods can open. In Bergen County, N. J., blue laws bar the Sunday sale of clothing, appliances and furniture — but boats, hardware, anti-ques and jewelry aren't affected. Some store owners must rope off aisles of prohibited items. Since 2002, 12 states have rolled back their blue laws to permit Sunday liquor sales. In days of giant budget woes, it brings in needed tax revenue.

Pennsylvania has gained more than \$22 million since 2003 when it allowed Sunday sales, notes the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States. Blue-law supporters maintain that a day of rest is necessary and that reluctant employees are forced to work Sundays. But sensible laws exist to protect workers who wish to observe the Sabbath. Many employees want to work Sundays to earn extra income, often at a mandatory time-and-a-half rate. Sundays are the second busiest shopping day. Preventing commerce just makes life more difficult for busy people. In an era when consumers can shop 24/7 on the Internet, blue laws put brick-and-mortar retailers at a competitive disadvantage. Enforcement of blue laws is thankfully spotty, but eliminating the archaic codes would be better. Merchants, their employees and customers ought to be able to decide for themselves when to shop and work.