

San Francisco to join list of those banning cashless stores

May 7 2019, by Janie Har



This Thursday, May 2, 2019, photo shows a sign posted on a door alerting customers that cash is not accepted at Freshroll Vietnamese Rolls and Bowls in San Francisco. San Francisco is about to require brick-and-mortar retailers to take cash in payment for goods, joining Philadelphia and New Jersey in banning a practice that critics say discriminates against the poor. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

San Francisco is about to require brick-and-mortar retailers to take cash as payment, joining Philadelphia and New Jersey in banning a growing paperless practice that critics say discriminates against low-income people who may not have access to credit cards.

The Board of Supervisors will take up the issue at a meeting Tuesday, and it's likely to pass because nearly all 11 members are listed as sponsors or co-sponsors.

"I just felt it wasn't fair that if someone wanted to buy a sandwich in a store, and they had cash, that they would be turned away," said Supervisor Vallie Brown, who introduced the legislation. "We also have our homeless population. They're not banked."

In many ways, the legislation is an easy call for San Francisco officials, who strive to make life more equitable in a city with an enormous wealth gap.

High-paid tech workers who flocked to San Francisco to work for Facebook, Google, Uber and Airbnb may like the ease of paying by credit card, debit card or smartphone. But many [low-income people](#), including more than 4,000 who sleep on San Francisco's streets every night, likely don't have money to sustain bank accounts.

According to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 17 percent of African American households and 15 percent of Latino households had no [bank account](#).

Some people also prefer to use cash because they don't want to leave a digital trail of where they have been and what they have bought.

San Francisco's legislation requires brick-and-mortar businesses to accept cash for goods and some services. Temporary pop-up stores and

internet-only businesses such as ride-hailing companies would be exempt, as would food trucks, which say they lack the resources to handle cash.

Philadelphia and New Jersey passed similar laws this year. Legislation requiring merchants to accept cash also has been introduced in New York City.

The efforts come after the rollout last year of cashless Amazon Go stores, which require customers to scan an app to enter. Whatever items customers take are automatically tallied in a virtual cart and the total charged to a credit card. The retail giant bowed to pressure and agreed to accept cash at more than 30 cashless stores last month, though it has not said when the change will happen.

Though plenty of cheap dim sum spots, taquerias and dive bars take only cash, some retailers argue that not taking cash is safer and more efficient.

Cashless restaurants are clustered in San Francisco's Financial District and South of Market neighborhoods, where white-collar employees devour upscale salads and protein bowls.

Those now refusing paper money include Bluestone Lane, a New York-based coffee chain, and The Organic Coup, which sells organic fast-food chicken. At Freshroll Vietnamese Rolls & Bowls, which has several lunch spots downtown, signs remind customers of its no-cash policy.

Andy Stone, vice president of brand marketing at Bluestone Lane, said the company "will always comply with the laws of jurisdictions where we operate" and is awaiting the vote.

The other companies did not respond to requests for comment from The

Associated Press.

Some businesses appear to be getting on board as the backlash grows.

Salad chain Sweetgreen announced last month that it will accept cash at all its restaurants by year's end, saying going cashless "had the unintended consequence of excluding those who prefer to pay or can only pay with [cash](#)."

The San Francisco Chamber of Commerce did not take a position on the proposal.

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