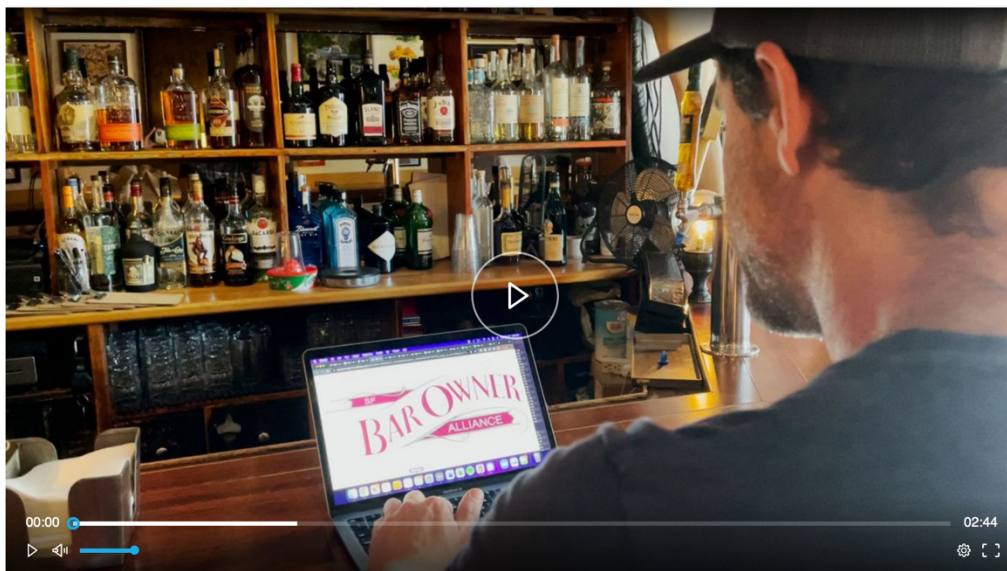


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INSIDE THE ISSUES

Bars look to extend closing time as COVID relief

By Daniela Pardo and Jackson Ellison Sacramento

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California bar owners are pushing for legislation to extend the hours of last call.

A move bar owners believe will help cities have world-class nightlife, while also helping establishments recover from the pandemic.

What You Need To Know

SB 930 would give bars in San Francisco, West Hollywood, and Palm Springs the option to stay open until 4 a.m.

State Sen. Scott Wiener has attempted to pass this type of legislations three times, but now it is being promoted as a way for bars to recover from the pandemic

The bill has received major opposition, with opponents saying the bill is reckless and will lead to more alcohol-related deaths

SB 930 has to clear one more legislative hurdle, passing through the Assembly floor, before it arrives on Gov. Gavin Newsom's desk

SB 930, introduced by state Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco) would give bars in three cities — San Francisco, West Hollywood, and Palm Springs — the option to stay open until 4 a.m.

“This is about allowing cities to decide what nightlife works for them locally, instead of having the current one-size-fits-all that the curtain drops at 2 a.m. no matter what.” Wiener said.

This is Wiener's third attempt at passing this type of legislation. The difference now is the legislation is being promoted as a way for bars in the three cities to recover from the pandemic.

Ben Bleiman owns several bars in San Francisco and is the founder of the San Francisco Bar Owner Alliance, an advocacy group for bars and nightlife in California. He believes extending last call will have a tremendous positive impact.

“I think that this measure has the opportunity to wave, literally wave, well, figuratively, wave a magic wand and actually change these three cities in California into world class nightlife cities,” Bleiman said.

Bleiman notes having all bars in California close at 2 a.m. makes it difficult for major cities’ nightlife to compete with other cities around the world.

“It’s embarrassing that California has liquor laws on the book, first of all that are from 100 years ago back when alcohol was considered the devil,” Bleiman said, “And second of all, they have laws that apply to some tiny, little town in the Central Valley as they do to a world-class city like San Francisco or LA, even Palm Springs.”

SB 930 has received major opposition. Opponents believe the bill is reckless and will lead to more alcohol-related deaths.

“Let’s not let tragedy take a back seat to commerce because this is needless tragedy,” Assembly member Tom Lackey (R-Palmdale) said.

Bleiman says other major cities have been able to implement later closing times, and people in cities rely on alternative transportation when drinking at bars.

“The blood will be on your hands argument is just absurd. We are a world-class city. Let us do what every other world-class city, I mean Vegas, New York City, Chicago, New Orleans, all of these towns, they serve past 2 a.m. and it’s OK. Nothing that terrible happens. Just let it be, let it happen,” Bleiman said.

Cruz Avila, executive director of [Alcohol Justice](#), says no good comes from people drinking later into the night. He also disagrees that extending the hours of operations will help places bounce back from COVID.

“They continue to say it’s a COVID-relief bill, it’s a COVID-relief package, but it’s not. It doesn’t come with that,” Avila said. “There are so many other ways for economic development across the state... Purchasing alcohol two hours later is not going to truly help that to a major effect.”

Bars take a majority of their revenue during the weekends, the most profitable time being from 10 p.m.-2 a.m. according to Bleiman. The two additional hours could make all the difference for local establishments.

“Giving two extra hours to many businesses in San Francisco, it literally will be the difference between life and death post-COVID here. Don’t mistake a business that is open after COVID, with a business that’s doing OK. We are strapped in debt. In many cases, decades of debt,” Bleiman said.

SB 930 has to clear one more legislative hurdle, passing through the Assembly floor, before it arrives on Gov. Gavin Newsom’s desk.

“I think we have a path,” said Bleiman. “It’s time for California to enter the modern world.”