



Opponents of Extended Bar Hours Make Their Case at a Community Meeting

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A proposal before the state legislature to let West Hollywood and five other California cities extend bar serving hours to 4 a.m. is getting opposition from non-profit organizations focused on alcohol abuse.

That was apparent last week in a community meeting sponsored by the California Alcohol Policy Alliance (CAPA), Alcohol Justice, Institute for Public Strategies and Behavioral Health.



In a press release, the group said "the forum was organized in response to the State legislature's fourth attempt over the past six years to change the state's last call policy for alcohol sales at bars, restaurants, and nightclubs. At the end of the lively, passionate discussion, an overwhelming majority of those present were convinced that the current bill, SB 905, like the previous three that failed, will spread alcohol overconsumption, loss of life, injury, and nuisance across the state. Next steps were also declared: tell California's elected leaders and the 'late night entertainment' lobby – STOP the 4 a.m. Bar Bill!"

Earlier this year, state Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco) introduced SB 905, a bill that would allow six cities to extend the deadline for alcohol serving, currently 2 a.m., to 4 a.m.

Wiener's bill would establish a five-year pilot program known as the LOCAL (Let Our Communities Adjust Late-Night) Act. An earlier bill by Wiener that would have relaxed the serving deadline statewide failed. Limiting it to the six cities that endorsed Wiener's earlier bill makes it more likely to get passed.

Those cities are Los Angeles, Long Beach, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco and West Hollywood. The LOCAL Act would let each of those cities decide whether to extend its drinking hours and to choose exactly when bars would have to stop pouring. The West Hollywood City Council endorsed Wiener's earlier proposal in a four to one vote in April, with Councilmember Lauren Meister opposing extension of the bar hours.

In her argument against Wiener's bill at the Thursday meeting, Carson Benowitz-Fredericks, research manager at Alcohol Justice, said "There is no such thing as 'local control' in alcohol policy. The harm from one city's decision to change last-call times splashes over every surrounding community."

Benowitz-Fredericks cited data that shows California already suffers more annual alcohol-related harm than any other state, with 10,572 deaths and 17,700 hospitalizations.

In a written statement, Los Angeles City Councilmember Paul Koretz also opposed Wiener's bill.

"While we want our local businesses to thrive, no good can come from serving alcohol until 4 a.m.," Koretz said. "If this passes we can expect more DUIs, more drunk driving injuries and more alcohol related deaths." He went on to say, "No district is an island and it is outrageous to call this a local discretion bill when its impacts will spill over into adjacent jurisdictions that will be stuck with the very expensive public safety bill – the cost of life and death."

Also presented at the meeting was an [analysis published by the U.S. Community Preventive Services Task Force](#), that found that every two-hour increase in last-call times results in greater vehicle crash injuries and emergency room admissions.

"The research is clear," said Gilbert Mora, prevention coordinator at Behavioral Health Services in Hollywood. "Extending closing times and removing restrictions on hours of sale is associated with increases in serious alcohol-related problems, including violence, emergency room admissions, alcohol-impaired driving, and motor vehicle collisions."

In California, more than 75% of alcohol-related deaths come from homicide, poisoning, falls, and motor vehicle crashes, all of which could increase with the usual binge drinking cutoff time extending to 4 a.m. Levels of intoxication continue to increase for 30 to 90 minutes after the last drink, so for many 4 a.m. last call drivers, their intoxication could peak at 5 or 5:30 a.m., not an unusually early commute time for workers in many parts of the state.

"Los Angeles and West Hollywood have very large densities of bars, clubs and restaurants, which already impact the safety and livability of our neighborhoods," said Sarah Blanch, regional director of the Institute for Public Strategies. "The communities we work and live in are concerned about increasing alcohol problems even further with longer serving hours."

"The negative cumulative effects on our neighborhoods has already and will continue to degrade our quality of life," stated panelist Oren Katz, Hollywood Hills West Neighborhood council member. "We cannot achieve, as our mayor would like, 'walkable streets' when our police department is already stretched thin; when we are in the middle of an ever-growing homeless crisis; when we are tasked with regulating the legalization of drugs; and we are in the middle of fighting the proposal to extend the drinking hours until 4 a.m."

SB 905 is scheduled for a hearing in the California Senate Committee on Governmental Organization on July 13.