



Nightlife at the Mayan downtown

Miles Najera

L.A. Could See Legal After-Hours Alcohol at Bars and Clubs Under New Proposal

[Dennis Romero](#) | November 29, 2017

For the fourth time in four years, a proposal seeks to breach California's long-standing 2 a.m. last call for alcohol.

This time around the legislation would apply to key cities, including Los Angeles, whose leaders have expressed interest in extending drinking hours. It would not be a statewide move to 4 a.m. last call, and it would allow those cities covered in the bill to extend hours as they see fit — on certain days, holidays or weekends — or not at all.

The latest proposal, a five-year pilot program known as the LOCAL (Let Our Communities Adjust Late-Night) Act, comes from San Francisco–based state Sen. Scott Wiener, whose last attempt essentially [died last summer in the Assembly Appropriation Committee](#) after seeing more success — it was approved by the Senate — than any other attempt to extend drinking hours.

"We hit a snag in our final committee, and it didn't move forward in the Assembly," Wiener said during a news conference announcing his latest try. "This time we are limiting the bill to the six cities whose mayors have expressed interest in later closing times. These are cities with great nightlife, and their nightlife is going to get better."

Those cities are Los Angeles, Long Beach, West Hollywood, San Francisco, Oakland and Sacramento. Mayor Eric Garcetti said in a statement, "Cities should be able to choose for themselves whether extending nightlife hours would make sense for a community."

While the legislation would allow the City Council to decide whether to let bars, clubs and restaurants serve later than 2 a.m., approval for the idea is not a sure thing, even for an L.A. body that often votes in unison. Councilman Paul Koretz opposed the last version of Wiener's bill, and he opposes this one.

"Bringing back a losing bill doesn't seem like good public policy," he said via email. "Extending alcohol sales until 4 a.m. is still a bad idea and will lead to the death of innocent and unsuspecting people. The Greater Los Angeles area is a network of unique and diverse neighborhoods and while we want our businesses to thrive, this will only drastically increase the number of DUIs and catastrophic alcohol-related accidents. In addition, the bill does not provide resources for public safety and will put a burden on law enforcement and municipalities that could prove fatal."

Statewide anti-alcohol groups are expected to line up against the legislation, too. The [California Alcohol Policy Alliance](#) "will vigorously oppose this bill again," says Bruce Livingston, CEO of the national nonprofit group Alcohol Justice, which is a member of the alliance. "It's about creating a little more profit for some bar owners," he says.

Opponents have argued that extending hours would put drunk drivers on the road at a bad time — when the morning rush hour is on the horizon. It also has been suggested that later serving times would affect big-city minority communities more than others because many of those neighborhoods are already home to a disproportionate number of alcohol businesses. The bill, however, would not apply to liquor stores.

Richard Zaldivar, co-chair of the alliance, said the timing was a bad look for [a California Legislature dealing with sexual harassment allegations](#), some of which center around bars. "It detracts from the role that alcohol plays in sexual harassment," he said via email.

Those rooting for 4 a.m. closing times say that extending the time drinkers go home would actually be safer than having bars and clubs all let out at 2 a.m., which they also argue can [overwhelm police in party zones like Hollywood](#).

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Supporters of the idea also argue that urban California is one of the rare urban coastal areas with such limited serving time. They expressed embarrassment that world-savvy visitors to places like L.A. and San Francisco are disappointed by the bar and club hours. "This is an antiquated situation here in California," Mark Leno, the former state senator who first introduced the idea of 4 a.m. closing times in 2013, said during Wiener's press conference.

[California tourism](#) composes one of the state's largest industries and brings in an estimated \$126 billion in spending and \$10 billion in taxes. Tourists come to the Golden State "expecting late-night options" but have a hard time finding them, Ben Bleiman, a member of the board at the California Music and Culture Association, said during the conference.

Wiener added, "Nightlife is a big factor in the California economy. It's part of the culture of our community."

The legislator's office says the bill will be officially submitted in the new year.

Dennis Romero is an *L.A. Weekly* staff writer. He formerly worked at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Los Angeles Times*, where he participated in Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage of the L.A. riots. His work has appeared in *Rolling Stone* online, *the Guardian* and, as a young stringer, the *New York Times*.

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