

Pennsylvania isn't the only state to consider extending last call. Here are the commonwealth's laws and why science says they should stay that way

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Legislation that would extend liquor license hours in the commonwealth has garnered a lot of criticism from bar owners and patrons alike even before it has hit the floor.

A yet-to-be-introduced bill, sponsored by a state legislator from Philadelphia, lets municipalities decide how late alcohol can be served — arguing it's a way to help the industry recover as the COVID-19 pandemic wanes.

[Operators in the Lehigh Valley said "It's stupid,"](#) and residents have said, ["Nothing good can possibly come of this."](#)

While Pennsylvania isn't the only state thinking later last calls would help the industry, studies show that [95,000 people already die annually](#) from excessive alcohol use, and there's a correlation between later last calls and increases in car crashes and violence, overwhelming emergency rooms and police resources.

In the commonwealth

Currently, [state liquor laws](#) permit license-holders to sell alcohol from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m. If an operator has a Sunday sales permit, they're allowed to sell drinks between 9 a.m. and 2 a.m.

Patrons are required to vacate a bar or restaurant by 2:30 a.m.

And during daylight saving time, operators who have a license to stay open until 2 a.m. get an extra hour when the clocks turn back, but lose an hour when they're turned forward.

[Find out which liquor Lehigh Valley residents spent \\$7.6M on during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with 9 other best-selling spirits »](#)

Recent efforts to push last call

Even before the pandemic, legislators in Pennsylvania and other states — from both sides of the aisle — have tried to push last call.

Rep. Jordan Harris, D-Philadelphia, tried to extend last call to 4 a.m. in Pennsylvania, but [a 2015 measure failed](#).

In February, [The Detroit News reported](#) a Republican representative in Michigan tried to extend last call from 2 a.m. to 4 a.m., arguing there's a market for late-night alcohol sales and it would benefit those that work outside a 9-to-5 schedule.

In 2019, lawmakers in California tried to push a “last call bill” for 10 cities: Sacramento, San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, West Hollywood, Long Beach, Coachella, Cathedral City, Fresno and Palm Springs, according to a report from [CBS Sacramento](#). Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr. [vetoed it](#) saying, “I believe we have enough mischief from midnight to 2 without adding two more hours of mayhem.”

And in 2014, a Democrat in Delaware tried to push the state's last call from 1 a.m. to 2 a.m., [but it also failed](#).

Upcoming legislation in Pennsylvania

Harris [plans to introduce a bill soon](#) that would give municipalities the ability to extend liquor license hours from 2 a.m. to 4 a.m.

He argues the commonwealth is losing bar and restaurants patrons to states like New York, where the last call is later, and the change would help the industry recover after the pandemic.

“Giving local municipalities the option to create entertainment zones where bars, restaurants, clubs and theaters can stay open until 4 a.m. will not only help those businesses bring in additional revenue, but help create the vibrant, thriving nightlife our world-class cities deserve,” he said in an emailed statement. “We should not have Pennsylvanians crossing state lines for better nightlife options when we can create those options in our own cities.

“They've sacrificed tremendously for our health and safety and deserve everything we can do to support them,” he said.

The bill has yet to be introduced, and there is no time frame for when it could be.

[Pennsylvania Senate approves drinks-to-go measure to help restaurants and bars; detractors say it will do more harm than good »](#)

What science says

People started drinking more than ever during the pandemic, and [alcohol sales surged](#) across the country and in the Lehigh Valley.

[A December 2020 study](#) showed the increases in stress during the pandemic led to an uptick in drinking, with 60% of one survey's respondents saying they drank more than before the pandemic.

A 2010 study published by the [American Journal of Preventative Medicine](#) found expanding hours of drink sales by two or more hours increases alcohol-related harms.

Later last-call times can increase alcohol-related car crashes, violence and could overwhelm police and emergency medical providers, according to [a June 2018 study from the California Alcohol Policy Alliance and Alcohol Justice](#), comprised of organizations that aim to prevent alcohol-related issues and injuries.

The study found that ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft “are insufficient to counter intoxicated driving trends,” and a late last call could overlap with “early morning commuters and school activities, removing insulation between late-night drinkers and daytime activity.”

The study calls for last-call times to stay at 2 a.m. or earlier and to reject “local control” rhetoric, because a “patchwork” of different last-call times could create issues too.

“There is no cavalry coming to clean up the mess. There is no magic app that will stop dangerous driving, violence or injury,” according to the study. “Fifty years of research spanning four continents shows that relaxed trading hours will hurt cities, neighborhoods and people. Legislators, researchers and community health advocates have to be ready to fight for closing times as a pillar of alcohol safety.”

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