

The 4 a.m. bar-closing bill would be bad for Oakland

By Nate Miley Aug. 16, 2019



Legislation would extend closing time to 4 a.m. in selected cities.

Photo: Getty Images

I strongly oppose state legislation that would allow select cities, including Oakland and San Francisco, to introduce a pilot program permitting establishments to serve alcohol until 4 a.m. Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco, claims his bill (SB58) would invigorate local economies in California and fulfill the community's desire for a more robust nightlife.

Unfortunately, this bill is detrimental to our communities because it lacks foresight, includes insufficient accountability, and will cost Oakland and Alameda County more lives and money than we can afford.

Wiener has a long history of championing bills backing alcohol sales, and I am deeply unimpressed with the reckless, sweeping nature of this "pilot program." The senator once gutted a bill intended to gather an expert panel to comprehensively study the impact of late-night bar hours in favor of drafting a similar prototype "pilot program."

I also genuinely question his dedication to public safety and commitment to community.

In vague language with zero concrete evidence, SB58 envisions a “well-planned and managed nightlife” in a supportive effort to expand alcohol sales. The bill intentionally ignores the fact that existing nightlife costs California taxpayers over \$50 billion annually due to alcohol-related violence and \$380 million annually in medical costs for alcohol-related vehicular accidents, as evidenced by the 2018 report from the California Alcohol Policy Alliance and Alcohol Justice.

According to the Center for Disease Control, about one in three traffic deaths in the United States involve a drunken driver. There are also health care costs related to alcohol through increased rates of violence, sexual assault and risky sex, leading to unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

Forty years of peer-reviewed scientific research leaves me with no doubt that extending the hours of alcoholic beverage sales is reckless and makes an already unsafe time of night even more dangerous for pedestrians and motorists.

On a community level, I fear that SB58 will result in a flagrant misuse of police time and attention. SB58 proposes a list of new crimes be created and managed by local authorities in a ridiculous effort to minimize the aforementioned public safety concerns. This bill has a tone-deaf lack of community understanding: The creation of new punitive measures is an opening for discriminatory criminalization, dressed up as community freedom and control.

I predict this increased enforcement will affect black and brown communities disproportionately. With so many other public safety concerns, is this where we should direct our police and sheriff’s resources?

I am concerned that there is simply not enough accountability written into this legislation. The authors have attempted to alleviate safety concerns by proposing the creation of a committee to evaluate the results of the pilot. However, they leave the specifics of this committee unnamed, and I am not convinced enough details have been included to ensure that their findings are accurate and reflect the needs of our community.

Finally, Wiener’s pilot program does not consider the “splash effect” it will have on neighboring cities. Residents of Berkeley, Piedmont, Montclair, Hayward, Castro Valley, San Leandro, Cherryland, Ashland — and even El Cerrito, Albany and Richmond — should be advised that every costly part of extended drinking sales hours will come to their doorstep as well. With few late-night public transit options, what will keep drivers throughout the region from traveling to San Francisco and Oakland for the extended drinking hours, then driving home dangerously inebriated?

SB58 is ill-informed, ill-advised, and will cost the entire Bay Area more lives and money than we can afford. I strongly oppose this legislation being enacted and, in line with the wisdom of years of peer-reviewed research, I urge that this bill be voted down for good.

Nate Miley is an Alameda County supervisor.