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## Alliance rallies against bill allowing later bar hours

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By Ken Williams | Editor

“Public safety matters more than alcohol sales.”

That’s the message from Lisa Bridges, who opposes Senate Bill 384, which would allow local governments to decide whether to extend alcohol service for restaurants and bars from 2 a.m. to 4 a.m.



California Alcohol Policy Alliance protests Senate Bill 384 on Aug. 22 outside the Observatory North Park. (Photo by Ken Williams)

The bill passed the state Senate on May 31 and is now being deliberated in the Assembly. Follow the bill’s status at [tinyurl.com/ya417trd](http://tinyurl.com/ya417trd).

Bridges moderated a news conference outside the Observatory North Park on Aug. 22, organized by the California Alcohol Policy Alliance (CAPA), which opposes the bill proposed by state Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco). Bridges is a prevention specialist with Community Action Service Advocacy, an organization that promotes public health strategies to prevent alcohol, tobacco and drug use particularly among youth.

Christi Walker, a program specialist with Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), said her organization was also against the legislation. She said the extended two hours would encourage drinkers to “bar hop in search of one last drink” and that would cause more incidents of drunken driving.

Walker said California sustains \$35 billion annually in the cost of excessive alcohol-related harm, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This figure includes losses in workplace productivity (72 percent of the cost), community intervention programs, health care problems, criminal justice system and more.

For the period between 2003 and 2012, 10,327 people were killed in crashes involving a drunk driver in California, according to CDC figures. Perhaps because California has shorter bars hours than many other states, California ranks below the national average in most categories involving DUI statistics.

“Adding more bar hours will cost California more incidents involving drunk driving,” Walker said.

Lucky Morrison, former member of the North Park Planning Committee, said he and his wife recently sold their home in North Park and moved to Point Loma. He said that after living in North Park for 17 years, he has seen the neighborhood become “a drinking destination instead of an arts and crafts district.”

Brian Curry, a former chair of the Pacific Beach Planning Group, said his neighborhood is plagued by drinkers who party until 2 a.m. and become a public nuisance. He called SB 384 “bad policy” and urged anyone who supports the bill to come to Pacific Beach at 2 a.m. and witness what goes on there. He attacked the “local control” angle of the bill as bait to lure in supporters, but urged people “not to be fooled.”

“Who supports this bill?” Curry asked. “Bars, restaurants and entertainers.”

Judith Rojas, a fifth-year student at UC San Diego who is studying global health, said she got into alcohol and drug prevention activism four years ago.

Rojas opposed longer bar hours because it would put drunk drivers on public streets at 4 a.m. when commuters like herself were driving to school or work.

“Put the safety of the community over alcohol profits,” she said.

Bridges warned residents that later bar hours would only diminish the quality of life in San Diego and California.

Meanwhile, the alliance chose to conduct its press conference in North Park outside the Observatory, where a near-riot occurred during a June 7 concert when rapper XXXTentacion was sucker-punched on stage and knocked out. The rapper’s bodyguards then began beating the attacker, and some audience members started fighting too. A young man was stabbed, sustaining a collapsed lung, but later declined to press charges. Police detectives closed the criminal case, but are currently investigating whether any of the theater’s permits and licensing were violated.

The alliance provided the media with a chart showing the 10 San Diego neighborhoods that have the most violent crime, and it includes North Park, Hillcrest and Pacific Beach. The alliance noted that seven of these 10 neighborhoods also had a high density of alcohol outlets.

Bridges and other speakers ended the press conference with a brief chant urging the defeat of SB 384, as the eight television cameras were shut off and the reporter notebooks were put away.

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