

By Luke Harold / August 8, 2018

Opponents to 4 a.m. bar bill speak out at City Hall

Los Angeles City Councilman Paul Koretz joined actor Kurtwood Smith and other opponents of a state bill that could allow L.A.'s bars to stay open until 4 a.m. at a City Hall news conference on Aug. 6.



Standing at the podium at City Hall, Councilman Paul Koretz continued his opposition of SB 905, which is currently pending in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. (photo courtesy of the 5th District Council office)

“Public safety, public health shouldn’t be for sale,” said Koretz, 5th District, flanked by opponents of the bill holding signs reading “kill the bar bill” and “stop Wiener’s 4 a.m. bar bill.”

SB 905, by Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco) would allow venues in select cities that sell alcohol to expand their hours of operation to as late as 4 a.m. as part of a pilot program that would begin as early as 2021.

On Aug. 8, the Assembly Appropriations Committee added the bill to its suspense file, which is where it sends bills that would have an annual cost of more than \$150,000, for consideration later this month. Additional law enforcement is one of the costs mentioned in the text of the bill.

The cities included in the ordinance are Los Angeles, West Hollywood, San Francisco, Sacramento, Oakland, Palm Springs, Long Beach, Cathedral City and Coachella. Each one would have the option to allow their bars, restaurants and other applicable businesses to stay open later, or to decide against participating in the pilot program and retain the current 2 a.m. closing time.

The bill, co-authored by Sen. Ben Allen (D-Santa Monica), passed 27-9 in the Senate. Sen. Kevin de Leon (D-Los Angeles) was one of three lawmakers who did not vote. In June, the bill passed the Assembly Governmental Organization Committee.

In March, when the bill was still pending in the Senate, Assemblyman Richard Bloom (D-Santa Monica), a member of the Appropriations Committee, had not yet taken a position on SB 905. His spokesman, Sean MacNeil, did not respond to a request for comment about Bloom’s current stance on the bill before press time.

“Residents of Los Angeles will not be lab rats in Sen. Scott Wiener’s 4 a.m. bar bill experiment,” said Smith, an actor known for his roles on TV shows such as “The Ranch” and “That ‘70s Show.”

Scott Suckow, executive director of the American Liver Foundation’s Pacific Coast Division, said the bill’s opposition isn’t anti-alcohol, but feels that it makes “unwitting test subjects of Californians.”

“There’s no doubt about it, we can’t get away from alcohol,” Suckow said. “It’s part of our culture. It’s at our family reunions, it’s in work settings, it’s in receptions and sometimes it’s even in communion at churches. So there’s no getting away from alcohol. But what we can do is to make sure policies we support, support the responsible consumption, and SB 905 is not responsible.”

Critics have been worried about the potential for increases in alcohol-related diseases. And SB 905 doesn’t provide funding for increased law enforcement during the extra hours bars and restaurants could be open.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 10,387 people were killed in crashes involving drunk drivers in California from 2003-12.

“Those numbers are very important, but I want to remind everyone that those numbers are people,” said Lynne Brown, a program manager at Mothers Against Drunk Driving. “They’re mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, coworkers and best friends. They’re people like you, they’re people like me. Death by DUI doesn’t have boundaries. ... Is it really necessary to put freshly impaired drivers on our roadways at peak travel times for commuters, kids carpooling to school, highway workers and the millions of visitors Los Angeles County enjoys every year?”