



## Letter: Half the poison is still poison. Fight the 3 a.m. bar bill.

[Community Contributor](#) Sep. 10, 2019 12:30 p.m. [Opinion](#)

In the reckless rush to extend the hours in which California bars serve alcohol, lawmakers are offering the residents a cup of poison. In the face of outcry from both health and safety advocates and the public at large, these legislators have poured out half that cup. Their hope is that we will somehow ignore the fact that half a cup of poison is still poison.

SB 58, the legislation that would extend bar hours in most of the major population centers of the state, has been amended so that last call would only go to 3 a.m. instead of 4 a.m. No matter what the closing time, the bill is intended to facilitate more alcohol sales. Already California bears a heavy burden from overconsumption. Each year, alcohol kills over 10,000 residents and costs the state \$35 billion. A recent analysis from the nonprofit Alcohol Research Group showed that 4 a.m. last calls would cost Los Angeles alone anywhere from \$266 million to \$1 billion over 5 years, and result in over 3,000 additional DUIs. A 3 a.m. last call might make those numbers smaller, but the total costs in money and human suffering remain staggering. The 3 a.m. last call is a promise only to make things somewhat worse, instead of much worse. This is a clear and fundamental failure of leadership.

This failure is inherent to the bill. Its lead author, State Senator Scott Wiener, has repeatedly stressed how important he feels nightlife is. In light of the passion he espouses, it is disheartening that he cannot propose any ways to improve it besides selling more alcohol—the primary source of harm in the late-night economy. In fact, the 3 a.m. last call raises questions as to whether this bill serves “nightlife” at all. The Los Angeles city council’s recent decision to oppose the bill shows resistance to late last calls emerging on the city level. Both the political fight and licensing and insurance fees necessary to extend bar hours threaten to make late last calls available to only the wealthiest of nightclubs and hotels. These operations make for great campaign donors, but is that worth the bitter brew that California will be forced to swallow?

*Carson Benowitz-Fredericks, Research Manager, Alcohol Justice*