



# Party On! Fresno Takes Another Shot at Keeping Bars, Nightclubs Open Later

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A bill working its way through the Legislature would allow Fresno to extend last call at bars and nightclubs to 4 a.m. on weekends. (Shutterstock)

Local bar hoppers and nightclubbers may soon be able to party for two hours longer on Friday and Saturday nights. It's a unique opportunity being embraced by government and business.

A bill working its way through the Legislature in Sacramento would extend last call to 4 a.m. on weekends and 3 a.m. on other days. But the change from the state's universal 2 a.m. closing time would apply only to Fresno and six other California cities.

That's fabulous news for one club owner in Fresno.

"It will give us the ability to make more money, you know, extend the hours ... more time to sell," said Cisco Mendez, owner and operator of FAB Fresno Nightclub in the Tower District.

[Senate Bill 930](#), authored by Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco, would give the selected cities the right to control where and how bars could stay open later. In addition to Fresno, the bill

specifies Oakland, San Francisco, Palm Springs, Coachella, Cathedral Springs and West Hollywood.

Wiener says extending business hours would help the hospitality business, especially devastated by the pandemic.

“This is about allowing cities to decide what nightlife works for them locally instead of having the current one size fits all,” Wiener said during an Assembly policy committee meeting last month.



The owner of Tower District nightclub Fab welcomes the possibility of staying open until 4 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights. A proposal in the state Legislature would allow Fresno and a few other California cities to extend hours for businesses that serve alcohol past the current 2 a.m. cutoff. (GV Wire/Albert Baker)

Mendez says the extra hours would help, since FAB is not open during the day. He says many of his customers are still going strong at the current closing time.

“People are having fun, intoxicated. And to just like kick everyone out at one moment ... it always seems a little, you know, counterproductive,” Mendez said.

The bill has the support of Fresno’s mayor and industry groups. One well-known advocate with Fresno ties, however, has come out against it.

### **Third Time a Charm?**

It is not the first time Wiener has attempted to keep night spot doors open longer. His previous try in 2019, also with Fresno as a pilot city, failed on the Assembly floor. His 2018 bill — without Fresno — passed in the Legislature before being vetoed by then-Gov. Jerry Brown.

Like the 2019 version, the city of Fresno is a willing participant with the full support of Mayor Jerry Dyer.

“Because SB 930 includes important protections, multiple avenues for local control, and a comprehensive evaluation before requesting expanded hours of sale, I am pleased to offer my support,” [Dyer wrote Wiener in a June 14 letter](#).

During a [June 22 policy committee hearing](#), lobbyist Angie Manetti spoke in support of the bill on behalf of Dyer.

If the bill becomes law, it is not automatic that bars would be able to extend their hours. Fresno would still have to craft rules and bars/restaurants would still need a permit extension from state regulators. The pilot program would run from 2025 through 2030.

Local nightclubs may benefit more than traditional bars.

“It’s not something we would do ... but I am not opposed to others having the ability to. As long as businesses are handling it in a responsible manner, I would be ok with it,” David Rasavong, who operates Banzai Japanese Bar & Kitchen, and The Lincoln said.

### **Alcohol Watchdogs, Law Enforcement Oppose**

Cruz Avila, executive director of the legislative watchdog group [Alcohol Justice](#), spoke against the bill at the June 22 Assembly Governmental Organization Committee hearing.

He is concerned about drunk drivers on the road at the same time as early-morning commuters.

“Just imagine folks that are that are drinking past 2, 4 a.m. when folks are just getting up to drive into work and what that could cause. And obviously there’s no good that comes from that,”

Avila, a Fresno resident and former CEO of Poverello House, told GV Wire.

Avila refutes the argument that extending last call is needed to help bars and restaurants.

“We can’t put a dollar in front or replace that for a human being’s life,” Avila said.

He is scheduling a meeting with Dyer to discuss the issue.

“I’m taken aback on how Fresno would ... want to actually support this bill,” Avila said.

FAB’s owner Mendez says places like Las Vegas are examples of how a late last call can be handled safely.

“Responsible adults can handle their alcohol and make wise choices. I mean, people drink during the day, all day. There’s alcohol sold all day. And it’s not an issue. But, you know, it’s an effort to and it’s an issue. But all of the sudden after 2 a.m., it’s an issue. I think it’s just a really odd way of policing adults,” Mendez said.

The California Association of Highway Patrolmen, as well as several anti-alcohol abuse groups formally oppose SB 930.

Fresno police chief Paco Balderrama declined to comment.

## **Next Steps for the Bill**

Wiener's bill is currently moving through the Assembly.

The bill will next be heard by the Assembly appropriations committee, scheduled for Aug. 3. If it passes there, it would then head to the Assembly floor.

Although it originated in the state Senate, the bill would need to return there. The first version of SB 930 was a housing-oriented bill, completely changed after votes in a process known as "gut and amend."

Where might the state legislators who represent the city land on the new bill?

Assemblyman Joaquin Arambula, D-Fresno, voted against Wiener's 2018 and 2019 versions of the bill. He is also a medical doctor.

Jim Patterson, R-Fresno, did not cast a vote on either bill.

On the Senate side, neither Melissa Hurtado, D-Bakersfield, nor Andreas Borgeas, R-Fresno, were serving in the Legislature at the time of the previous bills.