

City Council Consumer Affairs Committee Oversight Hearing on the Cabaret Law  
Written Testimony by Jeannie Hopper, June 19, 2017

Hello, my name is Jeannie Hopper and I'm unfortunately having a family emergency out of state and can't attend the hearing today. However, I most definitely want to submit written testimony to the DCA Oversight hearing on the cabaret law and Nightlife Task Force because I passionately believe that there is a nightlife problem in New York City. I have been a professional dance industry dj, record producer and label owner, as well as, event producer and promoter. In addition I'm a journalist and radio host in New York City since 1990 covering arts, culture and nightlife and have produced and hosted a weekly show prime time Saturday nights on WBAI 99.5fm since 1993 covering issues facing the underground grassroots nightlife communities while supporting indie artists, record labels and artists at the grassroots in New York City.

I am the host of Liquid Sound Lounge for 30 years (Saturday's 7-10pm on WBAI 99.5 fm). I am what the arcane definition of the cabaret law would describe as a "social dancer" -- I have danced and DJ'ed in bars, nightclubs, museums and in Dance Parade New York. Throughout my career I have worked with some of the world's most successful music artists, djs, promoters and nightlife owners.

I have sadly witnessed the horrid decline of the dance scene and loss of culture from Mayor Giuliani's so called "Quality of Life" campaign. The dance parties from decades ago had a true sense of family and community and I've seen the affects of the cabaret law create segregation and destroy the scenes where 'community is at the core' unified through the spirit of social dancing. This grassroots community has become not only a second family for many, but a safe space and place for the marginalized.

In the 1990's there were hundreds of places to dance, maybe even thousands. There were the larger venues above 200+ in capacity...Sound Factory, The Roxy, Tunnel, Centro-fly, The World which are all gone now. Cultural movements were born in these clubs. The scene was internationally recognized.

The only major one in the city today is Webster Hall which was credited as the first modern nightclub built in 1886. It began as a "social hall" for dance and political activism events--As a few months ago, this legendary venue is being purchased by the company that owns the Barclay's center. The Quality of Life movement and Guiliani's Cabaret Taskforce which utilized Dance Police to fine and shut down clubs may have addressed the larger club's gang and drug

problems of the 1990's but the smaller bars and venues were swept up with them--Along with the economic growth that fostered real estate development, great dance places were fined and shut down.

Today, according to the Department of Consumer Affairs available through NYC Open Data, there are only 97 legal places to dance in all 5 boroughs. In Manhattan, that translates to 40 venues---and many of them are hotels, restaurants and strip clubs. This is why we started having boat parties--because there are very few places to do our parties.

No one wants there to be a fire in a nightclub like the unregulated Happy Land fire that in 1990 killed 87 people in the Bronx. I can understand why there should be sprinklers in clubs over a certain size but venue capacity should be the thing that regulates venues, not the fact that people are dancing. The cabaret law that has caused expensive fire safety and surveillance cameras in nightclubs has created a scenario that is cost prohibitive for people focused on community building events where social dancing at the core. When throwing a party where there is no dancing allowed due to the archaic cabaret law, there's no choice but to break the law . I come from a family where my both my parents and grand parents met dancing, my grandparents threw dances, and my parents still dance to this day in their golden years.

We need to get smart with how nightlife is being protected. We should learn from progressive cities like Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin and London who have independent Nightlife Mayors to help nightlife. I'm encouraged by the proposed Nightlife Taskforce and Nightlife mayor but only if the cabaret law can be fully repealed.

--- Jeannie Hopper, June 19, 2017

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