

Chicago Happy Hours To Return? Lawmakers Could Scrap Decades-Old Rule

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In New York, happy hours are everywhere.
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CHICAGO — In other big cities, workers flock to bars near their offices on Fridays to take advantage of happy hour. For longtime Chicagoans, we'll explain what that actually means: a period of hours when booze is cheaper than usual at a bar or restaurant.

In Chicago, people use the term "happy hour" to describe post-work drinks, but we don't get the cheap beer. That's thanks to a 1989 Illinois law that prohibits bars and restaurants from changing the price of their offerings throughout the day or offering all-you-can-drink deals.

But here's some good news for lovers of cheap booze: Chicago could be getting its real happy hours back.

Crain's reported Friday that the Culinary and Hospitality Modernization Act passed the Illinois House Thursday and could be passed in the Senate this week or next:

"Under the proposed legislation, which passed the Illinois House yesterday and appears headed for passage in the Senate today or tomorrow, restaurants and bars would be allowed to offer discounted beer, wine and spirits for up to 4 hours a day and 15 hours a week. Some limitations will remain in place, including volume discounts (no two-for-ones, for example), and no happy-hour deals after 10 p.m."

The bill was sponsored by Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago) and has the support of the state's biggest food and hospitality groups, including the Illinois Restaurant Association. According to them, the "archaic and restrictive laws do not reflect the needs and current practices of today's businesses."

According to documents obtained by DNAinfo Chicago last year, the city has continued to cite bars and restaurants for violating the happy hour law in recent years. On just two days in 2013-2014, the city raked in \$139,900 in fines for folks offering all-you-can-drink deals on New Year's Eve and St. Patrick's Day.

Crain's reports that the new bill will allow businesses more flexibility, but won't scrap the all-you-can-drink ban altogether.

Last year, business owners weighed in on the ban. While most understood the need for regulation, they said the existing 1989 law is too vague and limiting.

"I don't think the city wants to close down taverns and bars; we pay a lot of city taxes and we are a city built on tourism. I think they are just trying to get everyone doing the right thing," said Dino Vulpitta, owner of [Brando's Speakeasy](#), 343 S. Dearborn St., [last year](#).

Vulpitta paid a \$5,000 fine after New Year's Eve 2013 because of an independent promoter who had put a flier on Facebook promoting a masquerade party with an open bar.

"We only had 60 people in our bar that night, drinking, partying and singing. It was a karaoke masquerade party. I'm not going to say woe is me. It was my mistake," Vulpitta said.

Vulpitta said he "thinks there's more to the story" and suggested that the city include a letter with new liquor licenses explaining the happy hour liquor law.

"There are so many gray areas with the happy hour law; it should be more spelled out," Vulpitta said.

Read more on the latest happy hour bill [here](#)