

# 'Happy hour' back in Illinois for first time since 1989

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*Sun-Times File Photo.*

They may not agree on a state budget, but lawmakers and the governor are on the same page about happy hour.

Gov. Bruce Rauner on Wednesday signed a bill into law that brings back happy hour drink specials for the first time since 1989.

The law is meant to help the state's hospitality industry by allowing businesses to offer temporary price dips and other marketing tools.

The bill is effective immediately, but there are some restrictions. Happy hour discounts will be allowed for up to four hours a day and up to 15 hours a week and can't be offered after 10 p.m. Bars and restaurants can't offer any two-for-one deals, and no games, "mega drinks" or contests. Establishments also have to advertise the deals one week in advance.

The law also increases training standards for bartenders, and allows hotels to have just one liquor license for all their bars.

Bill sponsor Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago, said she supported the bill because it was "pro-business."

"People have to realize . . . one of our ways to bring in more revenue is to make this industry more healthy and make it a more friendly environment for them," Feigenholtz said.

She said the bill will bring in more revenue, which is much needed.

"It may not be a broad brush stroke about solving our budget problems, but it's certainly going to make the business community more vibrant . . . and bring our liquor laws into the modern age," Feigenholtz said.

The Illinois Restaurant Association, which has been pushing for the change for two years, said the bill will help businesses expand their customer base with modern marketing tools.

"The ability to offer food and wine pairings; meal, party and entertainment packages; infused spirits; and discounted drinks – with stipulations – allows them to attract new customers and expand their businesses," said Illinois Restaurant Association President and CEO Sam Toia in a statement. "Ultimately, this legislation will drive sales tax revenue and continue to propel Illinois as the world-class culinary and hospitality destination it is today."

According to the association, Illinois restaurants supported more than 529,000 jobs, or 9 percent of the state's work force this year.

Restaurants are projected to generate more than \$23 billion in sales this year. Last year, they generated nearly \$1.8 billion in state and local sales taxes.