



CITY HALL NEWS CHICAGO

Allowing women to bare breasts in bars, restaurants will lead to ‘exploitation,’ alderman warns

Ald. Matt O’Shea (19th) is upset about the city’s decision to relax an ordinance prohibiting nudity in bars and restaurants licensed to sell booze.

By Fran Spielman | Dec 20, 2019, 2:28pm CDT



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Ald. Matt O'Shea (19th) is concerned allowing women to bare their breasts at bars and restaurants licensed to sell liquor, could lead to the exploitation of women and possibly human trafficking. | Ashlee Rezin Garcia/Sun-Times

Allowing women to bare their breasts in bars and restaurants licensed to sell liquor will lead to “exploitation of women” and potentially more human trafficking, an influential alderman warned Friday.

Three years ago, Ald. Matt O’Shea (19th) joined women’s groups in opposition to a strip club ordinance championed by License Committee Chairman Emma Mitts (37th) that would have allowed dancers to go topless and wear only a G-string at strip clubs that buy a two-year, \$75,000 license.

Now, O’Shea is upset about the city’s decision to settle a 2016 lawsuit filed by a transgender woman performance artist by **relaxing an ordinance** that prohibits bars and restaurants licensed to sell booze from allowing women to “engage in any live act, demonstration, dance or exhibition” and expose to public view “any portion of the female breast at or below the areola.”

The proposed amendment would “remove a prohibition on displaying of female breasts” at establishments licensed to sell liquor and remove “gendered language” from the city code.

“This is exploitation — pure and simple. The exploitation of women. The kind of ugly behavior that comes with that. We’ve seen it. I wouldn’t want that in my community. I wouldn’t want my residents to have this near them. Frankly, it’s not who we are as a city and what we’re about,” said O’Shea, Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s handpicked Aviation Committee chairman.

“It leads to prostitution. It opens the door to human trafficking. Exploitation of women as a whole. It’s disgusting. It really is. We have a fiduciary responsibility to protect taxpayers. I get that. But on a personal level, I have a real problem with this.”

Ethics Committee Chairman Michele Smith (43rd) agreed. “Strips clubs are the source of many issues surrounding human trafficking and exploitation of women,” she said. Smith wants the settlement and proposed amendment “thoroughly vetted” before either one is approved.

Ald. James Cappleman (46th) joined O'Shea and Smith in **forcing Mitts to drop her strip club ordinance** like the hot potato it was.

But Cappleman said Friday he attended the City Hall news conference where transgender dancer Bea Sullivan-Knoff announced the city's decision to change the law to settle her lawsuit.

It accused the city of violating the U.S. Constitution and reinforcing "archaic stereotypes" about the "impropriety of women's breast" by prohibiting only female employees, entertainers or patrons from exposing their breasts in establishments licensed to sell liquor.

"I want to make sure that I remain open to women and having them have the same rights as men. And right now, men can go barechested and women cannot. I really believe women should have that right if they make that choice to do so," Cappleman said Friday.

"As long as it's in a situation where women do not feel exploited and it's a women's choice, I will honor that woman's choice, including transgender women. The sense that I got from [Sullivan-Knoff] was that she was not feeling exploited by allowing her to show her breasts. I felt comfortable with that."

Attorney Brendan Shiller, who represented Sullivan-Knoff, said the Lightfoot administration had no choice but to change the law after a string of legal rulings went against the city.

"This is a trans woman performance artist who wasn't allowed to do her performance art in places that serve alcohol. It's a statute that doesn't recognize the spectrum of gender. That's a real problem in this day and age," said Shiller, son of former Ald. Helen Shiller (46th).

Shiller acknowledged a "potential side effect" of the settlement will be to relax rules that require women to wear pasties in establishments licensed to sell liquor.

“Could there be women bearing their breasts in liquor license establishments? If you go down to the corner bar and bare your breasts? Yes. ... [But] women bare their breasts in liquor license establishments all the time — on Saint Patrick’s Day and on Gay Pride Day. I don’t know what to tell you.”

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