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Fred Meyer

What's on your list today?

LOCAL NEWS

Crackdown on Problem Bars Proposal would give police new powers

BY CLIFF PFENNING
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

In the wake of a New Year's Eve shooting at a downtown Portland club that resulted in a bouncer's death, lawmakers are proposing a bill that would give police the power to immediately close a bar or tavern with a history of violence, something both law enforcement and community officials have desired for years.

Rep. Tina Kotek, a Democrat from north Portland, joined her counterpart Sen. Jackie Dingfelder of northeast Portland and Republican Sen. Jason Atkinson of Central Point and Rep. Sal Esquivel, a Democrat from Medford, last week to promote the specifics of House Bill 3295, which they hope will address community concerns relating to establishments prone to attracting violent behavior.

Along with immediate closure of a business for up to 72 hours following an event such as a shooting, the bill also gives the Oregon Liquor Control Commission more authority to revoke the liquor license of such an establishment.

"Most establishments that serve alcohol are responsible members of their communities," Kotek said Tuesday. "This bill is about protecting public safety in the limited cases where there are serious problems. It gives both law enforcement and the OLCC the ability to respond quicker to problem bars or restaurants, which is in the community's best interest."

The bill used the New Year's Eve shooting at Club 915, downtown, as the graphic example for its creation of the law. Police were called to the club, which catered to the Hip Hop music

scene, 19 times in the 12 previous months due to incidents of violence.

A week following the shooting, the City of Portland successfully petitioned to the OLCC to revoke the club's ability to sell alcoholic beverages. Lacking a

also represents north and northeast Portland, said expanding the power of police and civic officials to close a business will attract legitimate concerns from businesses, especially those that might cater to patrons involved in a more socially adventurous culture such as Hip Hop. But those establishments, he said, have a responsibility to fit within their community.

"I can see a reason for concern that an ethnic community might have with this bill putting some undue pressure on places that service their specific audience,"

Frederick said Monday. "But the broad backing from a bi-partisan group of legislators seems to go beyond ethnic concerns to the ability of a bar or restaurant to fit within a community.

"If your bar is attracting a lot of, say, skinheads, and you don't



Sen. Jackie Dingfelder



Rep. Tina Kotek

strong, costly legal defense, the club closed shortly thereafter.

Kotek said HB 3295 would have allowed Portland police, the City of Portland or even the OLCC to close Club 915 immediately after the New Year's Eve shooting, not six days later.

I can see a reason for concern that an ethnic community might have with this bill putting some undue pressure on places that service their specific audience.

— Rep. Lew Frederick



Along with the ability to immediately close a business for 72 hours, the bill also designates one of the five members of the OLCC Board of Commissioners to have a background in law enforcement. And it provides a list of benchmarks for permanent closure of problem businesses. Currently, the OLCC does not have a list of benchmarks and must use an often lengthy process to revoke a license.

Rep. Lew Frederick, a local African-American activist and Democratic Party leader who

have the ability to control those patrons, then the community around you should have the right to have its concerns addressed with some impact."

The bill is the second attempt from legislators to create a stronger set of boundaries that both law enforcement and the OLCC can use to regulate problem bars.

Kotek, Esquivel and Dingfelder were among a group of four legislators that co-spon-

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