

Monday, April 18th, 2022, at 1:00 P.M.

Comments of Andrew Rigue, Executive Director, New York City Hospitality Alliance and Chairperson of the New York City Nightlife Advisory Board on the Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection hearing on "Oversight - The Office of Nightlife and the State of the Nightlife Industry."

My name is Andrew Rigue and I am the Executive Director of the New York City Hospitality Alliance ("The Alliance"), a not-for-profit trade association that represents restaurants, bars and nightclubs throughout the five boroughs. I am also one of the City Council Speaker's appointees to, and the elected Chairperson of the 14-member, independent Nightlife Advisory Board ("NAB") that was established by the Local Law creating the Office of Nightlife ("ONL"). Thank you to Chair Velazquez and members of the City Council for the invitation to testify. Today, I will provide comments in both of my capacities.

New York City Hospitality Alliance ("The Alliance")

The Alliance strongly supported the creation of the Office as Nightlife. Nightlife offices have been established by governments around the globe that are dedicated to the planning and management of nighttime activities, economies, and the development and nurturing of sociable cities. These functions are vital to the city of New York, where our nightlife sector had an economic output of \$35.1 billion, paid \$13.1 billion in employee compensation, contributed nearly \$700 million in local tax revenue, and added incalculable social and cultural value to our city. Taken together, this impact will be essential as ever, as our city recovers from the crushing damage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We were thrilled when the ONL released its comprehensive report, [NYC's Nightlife Economy – Impact, Assets, and Opportunities](#) in 2019. It signaled a deep commitment from the city to address issues of importance to nightlife stakeholders thoughtfully and strategically. The report included a sector analysis, coupled with policy, programming, planning and management ideas. Unfortunately, shortly after its release the pandemic struck our city and the framework in the report was understandably placed on hold to focus on the immediate crisis. Now, we urge Mayor Adams and the City Council to work with ONL to revisit the report, update as needed because of the pandemic, and double down on the city's commitment to nightlife, as a fundamental part of New York's recovery and rebuilding.

While we work towards the future, we'd like to highlight some of the [key programs](#) The Alliance has worked with ONL on to date, which include Best Practices for Nightlife Establishments with the NYPD, MEND NYC Mediation & Conflict Resolution, MARCH Operation Transparency Reporting, Multi-Agency Support for Hospitality, Harm Reduction & Safer Spaces, in addition to other programming we've conducted such as regulatory education and compliance seminars and connecting nightlife businesses with pandemic grants and other support. We frequently connect nightlife business owners with ONL when they have questions and need to navigate and access city services.

As The Alliance is an organization that advocates for and supports the nightlife industry, it has also been valuable for us to have ONL in place to communicate the state of the industry and know that there is a dedicated team in place navigating the internal city bureaucracy that impacts our sector, while ensuring our perspective and on the ground experiences are being communicated to better inform city policy and programs.

Lastly, Senior executive director of ONL, Ariel Palitz, has demonstrated extraordinary leadership in building this office from scratch with her team, and exemplified a deep commitment to city government and nightlife stakeholders, especially during this unprecedented crisis. Palitz and her team have limited resources, and are part of a much larger, complex bureaucracy. But their ability to exceed the office's mission is clear and they've demonstrated proof of concept. What is also clear, is the city should increase ONL's budget so it has the resources and bandwidth to serve the nightlife sector most effectively and increase its capacity, while further empowering it to navigate, coordinate and establish policy within city government, which will be essential to the office's long-term effectiveness and responsiveness.

New York City Nightlife Advisory Board ("NAB")

I'm honored to have been appointed by the City Council Speaker to the Nightlife Advisory Board, and to have been elected by my 13 colleagues who were appointed by the Mayor and Speaker to serve as Chairperson. While I was appointed due to my expertise in nightlife and capacity representing nightlife businesses in the city of New York, as Chairperson, my goal and commitment has been to also elevate and empower the voices of my fellow NAB members and all nightlife stakeholders with whom we engaged. Members of the NAB are volunteers who represent a diverse group of stakeholders from nightlife businesses, communities affected by nightlife, the LGBTQ+ community, artists, musicians, experts in sexual violence, and others with experience and expertise in the city's nightlife.

A primary mandate for the NAB as established by Local Law is to evaluate New York City laws, rules, regulations, and policies on an ongoing basis to make findings and recommendations that address common issues and trends in the nightlife industry. After extensive work, NAB intended to submit our findings to the Mayor and City Council in early 2020, then the pandemic put that plan on hold.

During the following period of crisis, NAB worked with and closely advised the Office of Nightlife on strategies and policies to support all stakeholders within the sector. NAB members also worked independently to support nightlife by advocating for programs including the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant, the Restaurant Relief Fund, Enhanced Unemployment Benefits, extension of Unemployment Benefits to 1099 workers, a Fund for Excluded Workers, and many additional policies to support New York City's nightlife during such trying times.

NAB ultimately, submitted our [Nightlife Report and 15 Recommendations](#) to the Mayor and City Council on July 19th, 2021. While the recommendations we've developed before the pandemic, NAB strongly believes they still provide an effective framework from which government officials may lay the groundwork to enact laws, rules, policies, and systems that address the many complex issues pertaining to the City's nightlife, and that are important to a diverse group of nightlife stakeholders. NAB was deeply grateful for all the people and groups that informed and supported our work.

We urge Mayor Adam's Administration and the City Council to review our report and consider and implement NAB's recommendations. We will be happy to meet and discuss our report with you further.

Lastly, although my appointment to NAB is active, it is my understanding that most of the Mayor and Speakers allotted appointments have expired. We respectfully request that people are appointed to the vacant seats, and as Chairperson, I look forward to further discussing this matter.

Closing Remarks

On behalf of the NYC Hospitality Alliance and Nightlife Advisory Board, we thank you for your consideration of our comments. Our city's nightlife was devastated by the pandemic, and there was so much disruption and loss. Nightlife will be essential to our city's recovery, and now there's an opportunity to build back a more vibrant, supportive, and sustainable nightlife that's responsive to the needs of our city, and in which the Office of Nightlife, Nightlife Advisory Board, and New York City Hospitality Alliance must play a critical role.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Rigue
Executive Director
NYC Hospitality Alliance
arigue@thenycalliance.org

Andrew Rigue
Chairperson
NYC Nightlife Advisory Board
rigienab@gmail.com