

# Hotel Employee Safety And Workload Restriction Ordinance To Appear On November Ballot

■ By **ANNE ARTLEY**  
STAFF WRITER

The Long Beach City Council voted unanimously on August 7 to place an ordinance on the November ballot aiming to create safety provisions and workload restrictions for employees at area hotels. It also authorized a study on its economic impact to the city.

If passed, the Hotel Workplace Requirements and Restrictions Ordinance would mandate that hotels with 50 or more rooms must provide panic buttons to workers who clean guest rooms alone. It also would also require hotels to post visible signage informing guests of this practice.

The measure would limit the amount of floor space a worker is allowed to clean in an eight-hour workday to 4,000 square feet, unless an employer pays the room cleaner twice the regular rate for all hours worked that day. In addition, the measure would prohibit hotels from assigning more than two hours overtime without written consent. An employer must inform workers no more than 30 days before they give consent that they may decline the overtime without repercussions.

However, a unionized hotel may receive an exemption to the provisions relating to workload and overtime if the bargaining agreement outlines the waiver in "clear and unambiguous terms," according to the proposed ordinance. Exceptions for unionized hotels provoked controversy when a similar proposal failed in the council last fall. Councilmembers who voted against it were Suzie Price, Al Austin, Stacy Mungo, Dee Andrews and Daryl Supernaw.

On August 7, the council faced three options: adopting the ordinance without alteration; placing it on the November ballot; or requesting more research into the measure, postponing the public vote to an unspecified date.

"While I and the original makers of the motion supported approving it as an ordinance, the challenge became the timeline for enforcement as made clear by the city attorney," 2nd District Councilmember Jeannine Pearce stated in an e-mail to the Business Journal. "I was pleased with a

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**Jeremy Harris, Senior Vice President  
Long Beach Area Chamber Of Commerce**

unanimous vote of the Long Beach City Council to not waste another day with an extensive study or to push it off to 2020, but to do what the voters wanted, to place this on the November 2018 ballot."

In May, the Long Beach Coalition for Good Jobs and a Healthy Community submitted petitions with 46,084 signatures in support of placing the proposed ordinance on the November ballot. Last month, the Los Angeles County Clerk's office verified that enough of those were valid to qualify for the ballot. The measure required 27,462 signatures from Long Beach registered voters. The L.A. County Clerk verified approximately 88% of the signatures before the requisite amount was met.

"I think this is a huge victory for workers and community members any way you look at it," Coalition Director Victor Sanchez said. "I do think the council missed some opportunity to be a leader, to listen to the overwhelming support of the Long Beach residents who joined the cause, all 46,000 of them, who thought this was important enough to move forward. Although we would've preferred to have had this settled outright on Tuesday, I think it's a testament to the momentum and work the community put in to get it to this point." Sanchez added that the coalition is planning to host educational events and conduct door-to-door canvassing to promote the ordinance before November.

Juana Melara, a Long Beach hotel housekeeper who was named one of TIME's persons of the year for speaking out in the #MeToo movement, also expressed dismay that the council did not adopt the ordinance straight away. She issued a statement on behalf of UNITE

HERE Local 11, a union representing 30,000 workers.

"For the past four years, I have worked alongside many women and men in Long Beach to improve conditions for the city's thousands of hospitality workers with the focus of protecting the industry's most vulnerable workers from sexual assault and abuse," Melara stated. "Last night, the Long Beach City Council had the chance to adopt an initiative outright that would ensure that the mostly women of color who do the hardest and most dangerous job in the hotels, cleaning guest rooms, would have basic protections to allow them to do their jobs safely."

Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce Senior Vice President Jeremy Harris said that the council voted for the "second-best thing." "We were somewhat disappointed that we couldn't have a more robust economic report provided to the entire [block] of voters before they vote on this measure," he commented.

Based on the chamber's research, Harris estimated that the ordinance would cost the 14 hotel members of the Long Beach Hospitality Alliance about \$3.5 million, collectively, each year. This, he said, excludes smaller hotel members and facilities that haven't been built yet.

"We'd have to increase room rates in order to offset the cost of implementing

these regulations," Harris said. "Will that affect how competitive we are in the market compared to Anaheim or L.A. and their convention center? Will conventions go elsewhere?"

Harris argued that a decrease of conventions held in Long Beach could impact the amount of transient occupancy tax that hotels receive from travelers when they rent accommodations. Since the tax is then paid to the city, it could in turn impact the amount in the General Fund.

According to Harris, the majority of alliance hotels have already issued panic buttons. "Safety is always on top of our minds, but we don't believe this is a safety issue," he said. "This is really about unfair work regulations and an economic issue to the city based on over-burdensome regulations."

At the council meeting, Mayor Robert Garcia spoke to the city's previous support of the hospitality industry. He also touched on the importance of unions to ensure a "stronger long-term economy." He said, "I have strongly believed for a long time, and continue to believe, that low-wage workers are almost always better off when they are represented by unions. . . . I think the evidence and the science is clear that, particularly in low-wage jobs, you want those folks to be able to be represented."

Garcia stated that most of the discussion about the ordinance has centered on protection from sexual assault. "I think we should also know that this law would encourage more representation for the workforce. I think that over time, that's something I think is a good thing," he said, in addressing the council before the vote. ■



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