



STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE

Baltimore City Council President

100 N. Holliday St., Room 400 Baltimore, MD 21202 410-396-4804

Better Schools. Safer Streets. Stronger Neighborhoods.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Monday, October 26, 2009

Contact: Ryan O'Doherty

410-396-5538 (office)

410-818-4269 (cell)

CITY COUNCIL APPROVES LIVE ENTERTAINMENT BILL

Bill provides for "targeted expansion" of responsible live entertainment for Baltimore restaurants and taverns

BALTIMORE— At different times since at least 1980, the City Council has tried to enact measures to increase live entertainment venues to support Baltimore's arts community and to enrich city nightlife. Those efforts failed. Tonight, the City Council approved a targeted expansion of responsible live entertainment for restaurants and taverns in Baltimore's neighborhood business districts. The Council also approved companion legislation to provide additional community safeguards.

The live entertainment bill, sponsored by City Council President Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, would allow restaurants and taverns in zoned B-1, B-2 business districts to obtain a live entertainment privilege through the city zoning board and state liquor board. The new law demands that certain conditions be considered before granting zoning approval, including traffic, sanitation, security, and noise mitigation.

"I would like to personally thank my Council colleagues and community groups for working with me to complete this legislation, which will help Baltimore become an arts and entertainment destination for citizens and visitors alike," Rawlings-Blake said. "Baltimore always had the raw artistic talent to draw visitors, but too often, antiquated zoning rules got in the way. This legislation will change that and will allow Baltimore's cultural community to flourish."

The legislation was recently endorsed by the Baltimore Sun noting, "In a town as lively and full of talent as Baltimore, it's a shame the night life isn't all it could be... It's become apparent that overly restrictive rules governing live entertainment stifle the city's vibrancy and eliminate an important tool of economic development... Rawlings-Blake's bill to expand the zones in which live entertainment is offered is a good plan."

The legislation was introduced in July 2008 and moved through the legislative process with unprecedented levels of public involvement and transparency including several public hearings and work sessions throughout the City. The legislation was amended to address public input.

In addition, the entertainment bill was approved in conjunction with two bills that provide additional community safeguards. One authorizes the City Health Department to suspend or deny the renewal of a license for a food service facility that has received multiple environmental or civil citations. The health legislation ensures that operators are held accountable for repeated flagrant violations. The other bill, co-sponsored with Councilwoman Rikki Spector (District-5) allows the Board of Municipal Zoning Appeals (BMZA) to suspend or revoke a conditional use for failure to comply with the conditions imposed by the board.

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“I believe that we have done everything possible to create strong neighborhood safeguards to complement this targeted expansion of live entertainment. The process has been open and transparent—and now we have a bill that addresses the issues that were raised by stakeholders throughout the legislative process,” Rawlings-Blake said.

For more detailed information on the Live Entertainment Bill, please visit:
http://www.baltimorecitycouncil.com/LiveEntertainment_Licenses.html

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