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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

COMMONWEALTH *of* PENNSYLVANIA

***House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing***

Public Safety & Nightlife

Wednesday, February 8, 2022 | 10 a.m.

Representative Jessica Benham

10 a.m. Opening remarks: Chairman Bizzarro, Rep. Benham

**PANEL ONE**

10:10

Barbara Rudiak, President  
Jacky Kaiser, Second Vice President  
*South Side Community Council*  
*Q & A with Legislators*

**PANEL TWO**

10:35

Linda M. Rosato-Barone, Acting Deputy Chief  
*Pittsburgh, Bureau of Police*  
*Q & A with Legislators*

**PANEL THREE**

10:55

Allison Harnden, Nighttime Economy Manager  
*Pittsburgh*  
*Q & A with Legislators*

**PANEL FOUR**

11:15

Louis J. Kroeck IV, Esq., Board Member  
*South Side Chamber of Commerce*  
Joined by several small business owners  
*Q & A with Legislators*

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
COMMONWEALTH *of* PENNSYLVANIA



TO: Chairman Ryan A Bizzaro  
State Representative Jessica Benham  
House Democratic Policy Committee Members

FROM: Barbara Rudiak, President, South Side Community Council

DATE: February 1, 2023

RE: Public Safety & Nightlife

About 30 years ago, South Side was a model for effective community development with a focus on East Carson Street. In addition to a progressive group of business owners, an organization - South Side Local Development Company - was formed and tasked to fill the storefronts left vacant after the steel mills closed. They worked hard to fill those storefronts so that South Side could continue to be a neighborhood where resident needs could be met - be it a card shop, dentist, doctor, shoemaker, butcher shop, restaurant and/or bar, etc.

### **Shifts in Housing**

At the same time, the population that grew up here in the 50's and 60's graduated from high school, some going to college and others to the workforce and most moving out of South Side. When their parents moved out of South Side or passed away, the homes became attractive to investors who may have looked across the river and realized the potential for student housing and others who wanted to live on their own.

As a result, the residential community on both sides of East Carson Street has become home to more renters than homeowners - college students who live in close proximity to a number of universities and young adults who are in the workforce who like being close to East Carson Street, downtown, Oakland, etc. Property owners who live on South Side also vary in who they are - long time residents, young professionals, and empty nesters who also like the neighborhood's many amenities. The value of all of these properties is significant. Properties that were sold in 2023 ranged from \$95,000 to \$632,500 although many of these were purchased by LLC's and other investors.

Property owners who live on South Side have found it important to engage with renters who may only be among them for a few years. Through the South Side Community Council, residents work alongside the universities so that their students understand how to be good neighbors. Long term residents meet and welcome their neighbors through various community events - clean-ups, a spring social, neighborhood party, and block watches. These activities are helpful when there might be a need to discuss the various challenges that occur as a result of young people living on their own for the first time.

With that said, residents have gotten used to clearing their sidewalks of drink and food containers and, on occasion, body fluids on weekend mornings. They have found ways to muffle the sound of visitors who, after the bars close, look for their cars. They are becoming more willing to call 911 when the student party next door is out of control. They know to turn in

their rear view mirrors so that they are functional when they get in their cars the next day. For the most part, these were the problems residents discuss with each other on a regular basis.

### **Shifts in Businesses**

As with the housing, the same could be said about the businesses on East Carson. As a community we have always had quite a few bars on South Side but they were shot and a beer type bars that were frequented by mill workers. As these closed, new bars took hold that attracted a younger population who saw the South Side as a place to drink and have fun. Our community also saw the opening of new restaurants that attracted “foodies” from around the region. In the 2000’s, larger venues opened as nightclubs which brought in more visitors to the South Side each weekend. Over the years, some have closed while others remain. Some East Carson Street property owners found “the entertainment district label” lucrative and rented to business owners wanting to open more bars with larger spaces. In addition, bars in the Strip District and Station Square closed due to various kinds of violence and our bars and nightclubs became the place to be. Currently, other than nightclub style businesses, we are finding it extremely difficult to attract the kinds of restaurants and businesses that are finding homes in other parts of the city and county.

### **Liquor Licenses**

- **Saturation** - When questioned as to why there are so many bars and liquor licenses on South Side, I have explained that there is no limit to the number of licenses in any one neighborhood in the city. If there were 100 licenses available in Allegheny County and the applicants wanted to use them all on South Side, that would be legal. In any neighborhood, including South Side, when you have a saturation of bars/nightclubs like the ones on East Carson Street, it is unfair to the non alcoholic businesses on the street and well as the residents who live nearby.
- **Liquor License Application System** - The current process is truly stacked against the residents and neighboring businesses. As a result of our recent work in dealing with liquor licenses, it is our sense that the applicant is just about assured to get one unless he/she is a felon or has had previous criminal encounters. This is a really low bar to reach.
  - As a community, we, not the applicant, have a month to engage the applicant and schedule a time to meet within 30 days. This is often difficult to do when the applicant is an LLC and the attorney isn’t willing to provide the information or help with an introduction. As a community, we prefer meeting instead of filing protests because a meeting may negate the need for a protest.
  - When necessary, we will work with the residents and businesses around the establishment to file a protest. We, as an organization, may also file a petition to intervene. It is also necessary for us to work on a presentation of concerns for the public hearing. Although this is all necessary, it is time consuming, especially for a community organization like ours with no paid staff.
  - The laws are not written that would suggest that the applicant explain how their business would compliment the community.
  - The laws are not written to ensure that there is an appropriate level of enforcement should there be issues with the establishment.

### **Recent Years on East Carson Street**

Over the last few years, especially in 2021 and 2022, there has been a shift from students/ young people behaving badly to real violence similar to what closed the bars/nightclubs in the Strip District and Station Square. Shootings and fights have become routine. Not only has it become unsafe to venture to East Carson Street in the evening, it has become dangerous just being at home. As intoxicated visitors leave East Carson Street and venture into the residential areas, residents are awoken in the early morning to gunfire and fights outside their homes. Residents who were used to cleaning up vomit now clean up blood.

## **Gun Violence**

Gun violence has an impact on mental health. As we slowly ease out of the pandemic and hope to enjoy the many amenities that we have in our community, we are experiencing elevated levels of hyper vigilance and this erodes both our mental and physical health. Some residents choose to move while others stay to fight the fight to bring back a community that was once a safe place to be. But, we are all affected.

## **Perception and Reality**

There is a perception that the South Side is unsafe. Although all of South Side should not be painted with the same broad brush, the reality is that certain sections of South Side are not a safe place to be or live. In talking with some landlords, it has been difficult to find tenants for properties in close proximity to the 12th through 18th section of East Carson Street. Parents of college students who want to live on South Side have contacted community leaders to ask if certain addresses are in a safe area of the neighborhood.

## **Property Owners Not Invested in the Community**

Through the South Side Community Council's work on code enforcement, it is noticeable that most if not all of the properties with code violations are investment properties owned by LLC's, a number of them with out-of-state addresses. These investors need their mortgages paid and will rent to anyone who has the money without thinking about whether or not they are a fit for the community. We are becoming undesirable to those who eventually might want to purchase homes in our neighborhood and desirable to those who find the nightclubs a good place for them to do business.

The same can be said about the property owners on East Carson Street. Mortgages need to be paid so if a person or persons with no bar experience has the money for rent and can purchase a liquor license, they more than likely will find a place on South Side. Unfortunately, these kinds of establishments make it difficult to attract businesses that are diverse in what they can provide to residents and visitors. As a result, instead of residents being able to welcome and support new businesses on East Carson Street, we have had to become more knowledgeable of the process that begins when a liquor license application placard is posted on a window. Learning is a good but the depressing part is knowing how little impact a community has within the licensing process. Residents have also begun to reach out to property owners on East Carson Street asking if they need help in finding reputable businesses to fill their storefronts.

## **Airbnbs and BYOB's Storefront Events**

We are seeing more airbnbs in our community. In many cases, we welcome these visitors to our neighborhood but there are times when these properties become party houses that cause disruption to the residents around them. Also, on East Carson Street, businesses that presented themselves as daytime businesses at the lease signing, are instead spaces that operate until 4 AM and serve liquor to patrons who pay at the door. These places often exceed their occupancy limits and create problems for those residents and businesses nearby.

## **South Side in 2023**

Currently South Side has not remained a model for effective community development. Ten years ago the South Side Local Development Company disbanded because of a lack of funding. It was felt that South Side was doing fine and could continue without the support of paid staff. What remained were three community organizations - two representing residents and one, the businesses - with no paid staff. All three rely on volunteers to do the kind of community work that is done in other neighborhoods by a community development corporation. As an organization focused on quality of life issues for residents, we are grateful

to work with other residents on projects that are focused on making our neighborhood a good, safe place to live but it isn't sustainable.

As residents, we are not opposed to entertainment venues in our business district but when they become the main draw to our neighborhood Thursdays to Sunday evenings, there needs to be a change.

### **About Us**

Founded in 1939, the South Side Community Council gives a voice to the residents of the South Side Flats neighborhood and strengthens the community by celebrating and embracing its history as well as its arts and cultures. Through collaboration and community partnerships, it will address the challenges facing the South Side while improving the quality of life and economic vitality of the neighborhood.

**House Policy Hearing:** Public Safety and Nightlife

**Hosts:** Policy Chair Rep. Ryan Bizzarro and state Rep. Jessica Benham

**Where:** American Serbian Club, 2524 Sarah Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15203

**When:** 10 a.m. to noon, Wednesday, Feb. 8

**Written testimony:**

Jacqueline Kaiser  
1820 Mary Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15203

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. I have been a resident of the South Side for 18 years. This is a great place to live. A neighborhood packed with amenities - two grocery stores, small businesses on a Historic Main Street, various corporate and non-profit headquarters, a Carnegie Library Branch, Phillips Elementary School, two public swimming pools -one indoor & one outdoor, a post office, hotels, one of the best bike trails in the country, a river front park, playgrounds, City Recreation Centers, and many more. And all of this is in a walkable city neighborhood about a mile from Downtown Pittsburgh.

This is a city within a city and as you will hear from other panelists today, we lack resources to support our business district, public safety, and the quality of life in our community directly impacted by the saturation of licensed liquor establishments. The positive action that takes place in our neighborhood to support quality of life is done by our residents and community stakeholders. These individuals step up where government has left off, funding does not exist, and we cannot find support. If it weren't for the dedication of the volunteer community here in the South Side and the limited support we receive by our local elected officials, the fabric of our neighborhood would have fallen apart years ago.

[In fiscal year 2021-2022](#), the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board generated more than \$3.02 billion in sales and taxes from Fine Wine & Good Spirits Stores, direct deliveries to licensees, and from its e-commerce website. The money goes to the general fund, operations, and to the Pennsylvania State Police for enforcement of liquor laws. I'd like to ask the PLCB Board and our elected officials here today why funding cannot be allocated to communities with the largest concentrations of licensed liquor establishments? Funding in our case to support a Main Street manager or a local development group. We are living in a state that controls, sells, and oversees enforcement of liquor. Yet, in our community, while the State of Pennsylvania reaps the benefits of liquor sales the community is left to suffer and continuously clean up the aftermath.

Personal Experience- Nuisance Bar:

East Carson Street is the central business corridor of our neighborhood. It is also where 95% of licensed liquor establishments are located. I live six blocks south off East Carson Street. My block and the surrounding blocks are close to one hundred percent residential. Mixed in with the residential are a fire station, churches, an elementary school, and the old neighborhood taverns that have cohabitated with residents for years. For the past 60 + years, a location on the corner of 18<sup>th</sup> and Mary Street was one of those taverns. The various owners and their patrons frequented the establishments without incident or conflict for years. In June of 2021, that all changed.

A licensed liquor establishment opened at 153 S. 18<sup>th</sup> Street- EMBR. Prior to opening, members of the community met with the owner. The owner assured us the establishment was focusing on a bar and grill concept. When EMBR opened, it became evident the safety and welfare of the residents and the surrounding community was quickly compromised. What opened, in my opinion, was a micro-nightclub. Micro because of the size of the space <1000 square feet and nightclub because management focused on night club promotional events- DJs, dancing,

VIP bottle service, cheap drink specials, and Sunday night promotional events that brought hundreds from East Carson Street to our quiet portion of the neighborhood between the hours of 11pm-2am.

As EMBR remained open, calls to 911 increased. Trash and public urination were minute offences compared to the gun fire that became almost a weekly occurrence in front of the bar. Zone 3 City of Pittsburgh Police were forced to station a cruiser across the street from the bar every weekend. The shooting on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, at approximately 12:31 AM crippled me and the community with fear. A drive by shooting took place in front of my residence. Twelve shots from one car into a passing car. The shooter sped off. The shot-up car crashed, and the driver fled. At this point, the neighborhood & residents were afraid to leave their homes when the bar was open. The bar patrons committing these offences were not residents or community members from the South Side.

Not only were residents now in the line of fire, but the City of Pittsburgh Fire Engine House 24 which site directly across the street the EMBR, was also running for cover. First responders under the line of fire on our city streets and there was nothing we could do. With all the 911 calls, security camera footage, and media coverage we could not shut the bar down. Authorities needed to link 'bad behavior' to the nuisance bar.

We caught a break September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022, in the early hours of the morning when a patron fired over 35 rounds at another person in front of the bar on a Sunday night. This time, a camera allegedly caught him going in and out of the bar before the shooting. The teams of public officials who had their eyes on this establishment now had some evidence to take to the District Attorney. At the same time, I was also working with the Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement (LCE) and their Allegheny County Officers. I held a community meeting on Friday, September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and was able to gather over 50 nuisance bar complaints from residents and businesses within a 300' radius of EMBR. Still, the LCE could only show these to a judge and hope the judge would agree to padlock the doors. The volume of nuisance bar complaints could still not be enough, and we were relying on the DA to step in and close the doors.

The District Attorney met with the owner of EMBR, and they agreed to shut down and sell their liquor license. But the building owner did not evict EMBR, so they were not going anywhere. Due to Pennsylvania liquor laws, or vagueness of them, the owner of EMBR was able to open a 'BYOB event center'. The fact that the owner of EMBR could open a BYOB establishment after all the prior LCE enforcement violations and public safety issues is mind boggling. A BYOB establishment makes enforcement by LCE almost impossible. It also put the community in the worst position in terms of public safety.

On Sunday, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, EMBR held a promotional New Year's event & sold tickets. Was it BYOB or did they provide liquor under their \$25 cover charge? Regardless, gunfire rang out at 1:30 in the morning. I called 911 as well as other residents. I also sent security footage and the promotion information posted on social media to the landlord. Later that week, the landlord informed me the lease with the owner of EMBR was terminated.

While this nuisance bar story is not unique, the outcome of the establishment closing is unique. I am not an expert in Pennsylvania liquor laws, but it seems in the State of Pennsylvania there needs to be an act of God to close a licensed liquor establishment even one considered a nuisance bar. The laws favor and protect the license holders while the surrounding community suffers. Short of being a felon, you can file for and purchase a Restaurant 'R' liquor license. The judicial system also favors the license holders if any offenders even make it to court.

To my knowledge, there are no Pennsylvania liquor laws stopping the former owner of EMBR from purchasing a new R license most likely under the guise of an LLC. EMBR wasn't his first licensed establishment and will probably not be his last.

#### Liquor Licenses- Saturation:

The Public Safety & Nightlife issues are mainly focused on the East Carson Street business corridor. Those issues are due to the saturation of licensed liquor establishments that dominate the business corridor. While the State of Pennsylvania maintains the quotas allowed by County via the Quota System established by law in 1939, there is nothing to my knowledge mandating saturation on a local level in the City of Pittsburgh. Via a PLCB+ License Search on January 31, 2023:

- Number of Restaurant 'R' licenses Active or in Safekeeping:
  - Allegheny County- 1554
  - City of Pittsburgh – 587
  - Zip Code 15203 (South Side Neighborhood)- 82
  - East Carson Street 54

Fifty-Four licenses withing a 2.5-mile stretch of East Carson Street.

#### Physical Safety- East Carson Street:

Route 837 East Carson Street is a state road. PennDOT will soon complete a \$17.5 million dollar project that includes: milling and resurfacing, signage and signal upgrades, concrete pavement patching, drainage, guide rails, ADA ramps, curb and sidewalk patching, pavement markings and other miscellaneous construction along the 2.5-mile stretch. The PennDOT project on East Carson Street provided critical infrastructure upgrades for vehicular and pedestrian safety. The project did not take into consideration additional safety features and considerations for Public Safety and Nightlife issues. Exhibit A was submitted by the South Side Community Council (SSCC) to the City of Pittsburgh as part of a public safety meeting held on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. Many of these items still must be addressed by the City of Pittsburgh, our elected state officials, business owners, and residents. To date, volunteer organizations like the SSCC, have spearheaded these discussions to bring stakeholders to the table and bring resolution to community issues caused by the saturation of licensed liquor establishments.



## Our Goals for East Carson Street and a Safe South Side

- 1. Keep East Carson Street safe.** Residents and visitors should know they are safe on our main business district at any hour of the day. Identify problematic buildings, bad actors and nuisance bars that contribute to creating dangerous situations, and regularly enforce existing laws to improve conditions. This gives the South Side's many, other, cooperative bars, restaurants, and diverse businesses better room to prosper.
- 2. Re-establish East Carson Street as a two-way street.** Reduce the spill-over traffic, crowds, trash and noise that occurs on residential side streets, and places extra burden on residents to try to mitigate problems alone.
- 3. Understand the physical features and constraints of East Carson Street, and work within them to reshape the overall atmosphere.** This would eliminate drastic reactions (like street shutdowns), in favor of reasonable, regular, and iterative solutions.
- 4. Establish a longer-term business district management strategy.** East Carson Street is an economic hotspot for the City of Pittsburgh and deserves active management. We are too often reactive vs. proactive to the conditions on the street. There is more work to be done than council volunteers, business owners, and residents alone can shoulder.

## SSCC Recommendations for E. Carson Street

### Open Windows

- The operable windows of any liquor establishments facing a right of way that are playing music at any level must be closed and remain closed from 10 PM to closing.
- If music at any time of the day is blaring out into the streets, the windows should be closed.

### Doors

- The doors of any liquor servicing establishments facing a right of way that are propped open and left open need to be closed from 10 PM to closing so that the noise and atmosphere is contained in the bar.

### Occupancy

- The city and fire department need to maintain a night time, weekend and event occupancy inspector. This person should have the authority to access, count, fine and close any establishment for abiding by its occupancy certificate. This person's

authority should include the ability to strip a building of its right to occupy under penalty or fines when mis-use is identified. This should mitigate after hours clubs, raves and non-permitted parties.

### **Lighting**

- The temporary lights of E. Carson Street are unsightly and adding to the “war like” atmosphere when not in use. The new traffic lights being installed by PennDot should be altered to include high intensity area lighting that blends in with the streetscape and can be controlled by authorities when needed.
  - The area from 10th to 18th could be a test area and extended if later needed.
  - The city must update the street lighting of Carson for the first block either way from E. Carson to increase visibility and deter criminal activity. The street lights are substantially dimmer just 100 feet off E. Carson and can be easily updated to LED to address this issue.

### **Parking**

- Residential Permit Parking - Most of the residential streets off of E. Carson Street have residential permit parking. There needs to be enforcement officers dedicated to these South Side streets to curtail illegal parking every day and evening, especially on weekends.
  - Reinstate RPP signs along Merriman between 17th and 18th Streets. It was taken away because the owner of 24 S. 18th Street threatened to sue the city because the employees working in the building were having difficulty parking once RPP was enacted in that area. The city removed the signs. That owner no longer owns the building and the business whose employees were having trouble parking has relocated to The Highline.
  - Enforcement officers should also enforce other parking offenses - parking in a crosswalk, blocking a driveway, parking in front of a fire hydrant or parking too close to a corner. Currently, these violations are considered police matters.
- Parking Lots
  - The private lots on SS need to be identified to determine if they are being used for partying before and after visiting E. Carson Street. The owners would need to be contacted to see if they would be willing to close the lots.
  - The public lots need to be monitored to prevent any partying before and after visiting E. Carson Street.
  - Parking at Riverfront Park after dark needs to be curtailed.

### **Queue Lines**

- Foxtail, Mario's, Local, The Flats, Fin McCool, Twelve, and Carson City Saloon have queue lines in front of their businesses and often stretching further. These lines are the primary reason why people are forced out into the road and traffic on E. Carson Street.
  - An observation of the line at The Flats went along the front and then turned it down the side street to accommodate more people. This actually worked well.
    - Might the bars be asked to queue up their patrons on the side of their business and not in front? They all have side street with ample room.

### **Stores opening up as BYOB party venues**

- Two addresses on E. Carson Street have had parties with 100+ people in attendance. At one address, attendees were blocking the sidewalk and street and music was heard for several blocks. Advance notice of one event allowed the information to be shared with the city and it was prevented. The owner of the property was unaware that the space leased would be used for party venues.
- We need to understand what we, as a community, need to do to ensure that these pop-ups do not continue to occur.

Written Testimony for PA House Democratic Policy Committee  
on  
Nightlife and Public Safety

Allison Harnden  
Nighttime Economy Manager  
City of Pittsburgh

Honorable members of the Pennsylvania House Democratic Policy Committee,

In 2012, City of Pittsburgh's Councilman Bruce Kraus and former Mayor Peduto championed a study that engaged over 120 Pittsburgh stakeholders and provided a roadmap for creating a Sociable City. One of the recommendations was the creation of the role that I hold today.

As Pittsburgh's Nighttime Economy Manager since 2015, I act as the City's liaison to food, beverage and entertainment businesses and the communities in which they operate. In this role, I facilitate business support and training, monitor business challenges and community impacts, and develop responses to address them. I also serve as a subject matter resource to our city's leadership, making recommendations to improve nightlife and our citizens' quality of life at night.

Night Managers are a relatively new approach to harnessing the benefits of nightlife and addressing its challenges. There are less than 75 night managers in the world, and we share information daily through a global What's App. Along with Philadelphia's new Director of Nighttime Economy, we similarly communicate with our U.S. peers through the Nighttime Economy Culture and Policy Alliance.

All this is to say that I am acutely aware that Pittsburgh is not alone in its challenge to address safety in life at night.

The global pandemic inflicted a massive disruption and transformative effect on the night ecosystem. While it underscored the value of social connection, it also changed the ways in which people socialize and behavioral norms in social space.

All the issues of the day are now playing out in the night space: Diversity, equity and inclusion, supply chain issues, economics, workforce turnover, fair wages, social justice and gun violence.

My point is nightlife is not the villain here. The changes we have seen in safety at night are the same changes we see happening in the world. And just as we need new ideas and approaches to explore and care for those societal issues, we need new tools and investment to understand how they are playing out in our lives at night.

Some ideas for consideration:

**Assistance to Prevent and Address Speakeasies.**

We are grateful for the forum Representative Benham convened last year. It created awareness about the challenges and got the conversation started. But we have yet to tamp down this persistent trend, which surfaces in Air bnb's, in homes and in retail storefronts not designed for public assembly. Speakeasies are a grave risk to the public's safety and also present unfair and illegal competition with legitimate alcohol licensed businesses.

Just as there is education about what an entrepreneur can do with an alcohol license, there is opportunity for the state to develop more awareness to the public about what is not permissible without one.

**Things to do for Youth:**

Nightlife business staff are trained in detecting fake ideas, and do a good job of only admitting those 21 and over. Still, 15–18-year-olds convene on the streets outside. Without places of entertainment for youth, they are attracted to the energy of nightlife dense areas as their social gathering place. Not to diminish the impact of violent acts, but only some, not all youth, are participating in violence. The vast majority can be attracted away from it. We hear repeatedly that there is nothing to divert and entertain youth. Are there state resources to expand Pittsburgh's Community Violence Intervention initiatives and support Mayor Gainey's newly announced youth resource centers? Also, could state tourism invest support in creating more recreation that youth would enjoy?

**Encourage Live Entertainment**

Diversions are what people want in nightlife and when drinking is the only offering, it can lend to more consumption, higher levels of intoxication and sometimes violence. Violence is rare in live entertainment venues. Assuring a business district has a good balance of attractions and things to occupy patrons is a best practice that is encouraged. There are several hurdles for small businesses, including added taxation and regulatory demands.

The PLCB code requires that amplified sound must not be heard beyond property line. This mandate is unrealistic and can discourage the offering of live music.

**Workforce Investment**

The pandemic wrought massive shifts in workforce. Hospitality workers nationwide left their jobs, never to return. This industry, which has historically had consistently high turnover rate, needs assistance to attract and retain workers and re-establish its workforce. A consistent staff lends to consistent safety practices.

**Equitable Access to Socializing**

While but one indicator of socializing deserts, the steady migration of liquor licenses that have transferred out of depressed neighborhoods and communities of color leaves their resident with less opportunity to access jobs and mental health benefits of social interaction. Further, lack of late night transportation to and from those communities to nightlife centers puts such residents at a disadvantage to obtaining jobs in hospitality and in accessing neighborhood-centered social options available to more affluent neighborhoods.

**Time of Day Resource Allocation:** A huge shift in flexible work schedules are driving changes in consumer behaviors and lifestyles. Seemingly, more people are living their life at night. There are many workers besides hospitality on night shift and they deserve the same access to government resources as people who live their lives during daylight hours. Re-allocating more resources to nights and weekends may provide more presence, understanding and solutions to issues happening at night. But to change time of day resource allocation would require some data to justify it. Can the state explore this and provide data on nighttime consumerism and employment?

**Create the Nation’s First State-Level Night Advisory**

While this hearing is more tailored to public safety and to one business sector, night commerce and activity present other unique issues and concerns. Other countries have elevated night issues to a federal and State focus; the U. S. has yet to. Some such initiatives in some European countries center solely on the nightlife sector; others are concentrated more broadly on night industries. With a history of 24- hour steel mills, with new round-the-clock industries, and two municipal Offices of Nighttime Economy, Pennsylvania is well-positioned to claim this title.

In closing, I want to acknowledge and express my gratitude for the good relationships and collaborations with the State Liquor Control Board, State Police and Representatives Benham and Innamorato.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts. I look forward to partnering on a deeper exploration in the future.

Respectfully,  
Allison Harnden  
Nighttime Economy Manager  
City of Pittsburgh

**Testimony  
to the  
House Democratic Policy Committee  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives**

**on  
South Side  
Public Safety and Nightlife**

**Pittsburgh, PA  
February 8, 2023**

**Statement submitted by**

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**Board Member  
on behalf of  
South Side Chamber of Commerce**

## **Introduction**

Good morning, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing to address public safety and nightlife in the South Side of Pittsburgh, PA.

My name is Louis J. Kroeck, IV. With my testimony today, I represent the South Side Chamber of Commerce. I have served as a Chamber board member for eight years years. The South Side Chamber of Commerce advocates for the Historic South Side, its approximately 500 businesses, its residents, and its patrons.

I am a practicing lawyer specializing in civil litigation. My law office is located in South Side and I was previously a resident of the South Side for nearly 15 years.

In recent years, South Side businesses were prosperous before the Covid-19 pandemic, but it had nightlife public safety and crime problems then. People came to the South Side and enjoyed the bars and restaurants and entertainment attractions. Most dined and drank responsibly and acted appropriately in public areas. Others who came to the South Side and disrupted the social scene were usually arrested.

During the 2022 spring and summer months, the underage crowds got bigger and bolder, and the violence and crime got worse. There were increased shootings, robberies, car break-ins, muggings, and broken storefront windows. Many of the perpetrators were underaged. In those cases when police stopped them, the officers had no place to take them because the former Shuman Juvenile Detention Center in Pittsburgh was closed in September 2021. Even though they broke the law, many teenagers were not arrested for their crime and violence. When they were arrested, many were let go.

## Increase in Violence

The 71 homicides citywide in 2022 amounted to a grim 39% increase from the previous year, when 51 people were killed. Like many other cities, Pittsburgh had experienced a decline in killings in the years preceding the pandemic. From 2007 through 2021, the city averaged about 53 homicides annually. (Pittsburgh Post Gazette, 1/8/2023<sup>1</sup>)

Crime in South Side <sup>2</sup>	2019	2022
Shots Fired	44	92
Aggravated Assaults with a Firearm	3	11
Non-fatal Shootings	4	12

## Decrease in Business Revenue

Some prominent South Side businesses closed. The ones that stayed open have suffered dramatic revenue losses, some down 70% this past summer, some still down 50%. One retail business owner that has been in South Side for twenty-eight (28) years said they had their worst business days in the summer of 2022 because their customers are afraid to come to South Side due to the high rate of crime and violence on East Carson Street. Many businesses have complained to the Chamber about the continuing crime and violence. During the cold winter months, crime and

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1 <https://www.post-gazette.com/news/crime-courts/2023/01/08/2022-pittsburgh-murder-homicide-rate/stories/202301080015>

2 [https://tableau.allegHENYcounty.us/t/PublicSite/views/CJ\\_GunViolence\\_PGH\\_8-22-17\\_v2/Home?%3Aembed=y&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3AshowShareOptions=true&%3Adisplay\\_count=no&%3AshowVizHome=no](https://tableau.allegHENYcounty.us/t/PublicSite/views/CJ_GunViolence_PGH_8-22-17_v2/Home?%3Aembed=y&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3AshowShareOptions=true&%3Adisplay_count=no&%3AshowVizHome=no)

violence has decreased due to the harsh weather. But South Side businesses are bracing for warmer spring weather because they expect the wild teenagers will come back and make the South Side unsafe again.

Since April of 2017, the South Side Parking Enhancement District has collected \$1 Million through dynamic pricing of nighttime parking meter fees at designated times from Thursdays through Sundays to equip, manage, and pay for designated workers to clean the part of PA Highway 837 that goes through Historic South Side along East Carson Street. This is a huge South Side commitment to PA Highway 837. In addition, South Side flats and slopes residents, businesses, university students, and others regularly volunteer to keep PA Highway 837 and public areas in the South Side clean of litter and weeds; we also tend trees.

### **Call to Action**

The South Side needs your help to strengthen public safety and nightlife along East Carson Street and better plan, organize, staff, manage, and control the public safety and nightlife activities and challenges on PA Highway 837. South Side needs State resources to make sure that anyone who breaks the law along PA Highway 837 in South Side is held accountable and arrested for their crimes. This includes teenagers, who disrupt the business district and stop traffic as they run derelict. Their bold and unwanted behavior has alarmed business owners and frightened residents, long-time customers, and out-of-town visitors in Pittsburgh to attend sports and entertainment events. Many people have been adversely affected by the crime and violence in South Side.

In particular, the South Side could benefit from the reemergence of a community development corporation. Community development corporations help to support and revitalize communities, especially communities such as the South Side that are in need of social programs

for our youth, incentives for our struggling businesses and commercial development for our underutilized commercial spaces.

### **South Side Local Development Company**

The South Side Local Development Company (SSLDC) began in the South Side Flats in 1982 and followed the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program. It concentrated on businesses located on East Carson Street consisting of twenty (20) blocks of Victorian-era buildings. The SSLDC addressed high storefront vacancies and protecting the historic architecture that was intact and became one of the longest-lasting and most successful community development organizations in the nation.

By 1996, East Carson Street was designated as a Great American Main Street. The SSLDC Board was stable and engaged, and its staff was highly qualified and passionate. It had unprecedented success with storefront vacancies dropping from forty-five percent (45%) to thirteen percent (13%) and real estate values increased significantly.

The SSLDC had a new kind of success in that many new restaurants and bars opened up and created a more active nightlife in South Side mostly along East Carson Street, South Side's main street. These new nightlife businesses clashed with the community residents, who lived just steps away from all the new nighttime businesses. Many of the residents were older and had lived in the South Side for a long time before the new bars and restaurants opened. The SSLDC changed their approach for managing the new nighttime South Side challenges and in doing so realized that traditional community development funding sources were no longer available to sustain SSLDC operations.

In 2010, the SSLDC Board and staff decided that the remaining challenges would be better addressed by a different organization. It began to dissolve its operations and transfer its programs and assets to other South Side nonprofit organizations. To address the new challenges of an active nightlife business district co-existing in close proximity with a quiet residential community, the SSLDC searched across the country to identify business district models that could help South Side nightlife businesses and residents to find common ground to get along in harmony.

The SSLDC Board and staff recommended the creation of a Neighborhood Improvement District (NID) that had proven to be successful in funding programs and improvements in communities across the country. A NID would define a geographic area with boundaries in which either business owners or property owners are assessed an additional tax or fee to fund specific improvements within the defined area of the business district.

The process to establish a South Side NID was led by the South Side Planning Forum, and the SSLDC partnered as the fiscal agency for the NID initiatives. The South Side Planning Forum is a long-time nonprofit organization of representatives for community social services, residents, and businesses. It holds monthly public meetings and develops South Side Neighborhood Plans and other programs and initiatives in the best interests of the South Side.

After months of work, in May of 2012 with over 100 residents and business owners in attendance, the Planning Forum voted to send a South Side NID plan to the Pittsburgh City Council. With this first step in the NID process, it would require the City Council to send notifications to all property owners affected in the designated area. If sixty percent (60%) of those affected approved the plan, the NID would be instituted. However, the South Side's elected City Council representative informed the Planning Forum he would not take the plan to the City Council and effectively halted the plan.

In June of 2012, the SSLDC sunset its operations and worked to transfer its programs and assets. The City of Pittsburgh subsequently approved a consulting contract with the Responsible Hospitality Institute to study the South Side growing issues of an active and profitable nightlife business district and residents concerned with quality-of-life issues caused by the nightlife.

Since 2012, the South Side has not had a designated organization to manage the South Side business district. South Side needs to obtain funds to establish a business district organization to manage the nuances of having a popular business district main street co-exist on a busy PA highway just steps away from a high concentration of South Side Flats residential property.

The Chamber created and operated the South Side Welcome Center from May 2013 until February 2021, when the 1100 East Carson Street building location of the Chamber's headquarters was destroyed in an arson fire. It served South Side businesses, residents, and visitors there and managed a variety of community volunteer clean-up projects. As an advocate for the South Side business district, the South Side Chamber of Commerce continues to address issues and concerns in the South Side business district with one part-time employee and occasional, temporary administrative help. Since PA Highway 837 is the main street in the South Side business district, the Chamber is confident that additional designated funding would significantly strengthen and improve the public safety and nightlife environment in Pittsburgh's Historic South Side.

## **Conclusion**

The South Side Chamber of Commerce respectfully requests a PA Commonwealth commitment of resources to strengthen nightlife public safety management along its main commercial corridor, East Carson Street, a significant part of PA Highway 837. With PA's increased resources, South Side could have improved public safety and better control of PA

Highway 837 in South Side, attract new businesses to vacant storefronts, get more people back to work, and increase taxes paid to city, county, state, and federal governments. Between the concentration of businesses and attractions along East Carson Street and the vital role of South Side as a popular trail town along the Great Allegheny Passage, it would be a profitable investment for the State to help improve public safety along PA Highway 837 in the South Side. It would better protect the people who live, work, play, stay, and enjoy what has been a popular destination business district in Pittsburgh for many decades, the South Side.

## **Background Information**

### **Public Safety and Nightlife in South Side**

South Side is one of ninety (90) neighborhoods in Pittsburgh and one of twelve (12) trail towns along the Great Allegheny Passage trail that leads to the Cumberland & Ohio Towpath, spanning 333.3 miles and connecting Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C. by trail.

The commercial main street of South Side is East Carson Street, a prominent part of PA Highway 837. It is a very busy street every day and every night, especially on Thursday through Sunday nights. Nightlife has always been a big part of South Side businesses, and the South Side business district has reinvented itself as the industries located here changed over the decades.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought new challenges to the South Side as the restaurants and bars had to keep flexible, change to lower occupancy limits, and convert to outside dining and take out service to comply with official pandemic orders and to stay in business. Many businesses stayed open. Some closed and did not reopen. During the pandemic younger people, many underage teenagers, came to the South Side to go to private events in the South Side. Crime and violence got worse, and public safety was compromised. People were not being arrested when they

broke the law. The behavior of many of these individuals has been a detriment to our business district.

In recent years, the Allegheny County District Attorney installed security cameras along East Carson Street with the assistance of the South Side Chamber of Commerce and in cooperation with individual businesses. The City of Pittsburgh also installed security cameras at selected places along East Carson Street.

### **South Side History**

South Side is a popular social destination, especially for many young professionals and university students. It currently features bars, restaurants, live entertainment nightclubs, coffee shops, restaurants, pubs, retailers, art galleries, churches, vintage shops, a significant nightlife scene, and its treasured City Theatre. East Carson Street is a nationally designated historic district with blocks of three- and four-story Romanesque, Italianate, and Second Empire storefronts that welcome locals and tourists. There are local and long-distance trails, many bike-friendly businesses, and public art and memorials throughout the neighborhood.

### **About the South Side Chamber of Commerce**

As background, the South Side Chamber of Commerce is a community-based organization that represents the diverse interests of interconnected businesses, residents, and other stakeholders in the South Side neighborhood of Pittsburgh. The Chamber's primary mission is to cultivate common vision, unity, and business growth through member involvement in the community at large. The South Side Chamber of Commerce actively promotes our community's proud past, dynamic present, and its shared future. We are South Pittsburgh's working class, yet world-class neighborhood, representing a common coalition known simply as South Side.

The Chamber was founded originally in 1926, evolved over the years, and is currently a PA 501(c)(6) nonprofit corporation. The Chamber is a founding and continuing active member of the South Side Planning Forum, a consortium of South Side nonprofit organizations, and a voice to elected officials on behalf of the South Side business district. The Chamber is a strong advocate for the South Side. Chamber membership dues and fundraisers provide limited resources needed for the Chamber's continuing advocacy work.

The Chamber is committed to Historic South Side and promotes and protects it through selected programs and initiatives. Here are some of the main things that we do:

- Advocate for the South Side business district
- Assist South Side businesses and residents upon request
- Host golf tournament and holiday fundraisers
- Present the Soup Contest fundraiser with The Brashear Association
- Support other South Side nonprofit initiatives
- Participate in South Side community meetings
- Facilitate meetings with local officials
- Serve as Great Allegheny Passage Trail Town
- Host Pittsburgh Marathon and OpenstreetsPGH cheer zones
- Partner with VisitPITTSBURGH for South Side
- Assist South Side Vietnam Veterans with their events
- Request South Side business grants
- Organize special South Side litter clean ups
- Investigate litter and garbage violations
- Assist public works contractors

The Chamber's interactive website at [www.southsidechamber.org](http://www.southsidechamber.org) includes a mobile directory of South Side businesses, videos that feature the South Side business district, upcoming events and fundraisers, and Chamber board members. The Chamber may be reached at [info@southsidechamber.org](mailto:info@southsidechamber.org) or (412) 431-3360.

### **Local Events and Activities**

In the winter and on the Saturday before St. Patrick's Day, thousands of people make their way to South Side after the Downtown Pittsburgh St. Patrick's Parade to celebrate along the East Carson Street business district along PA Highway 837. The bar hopping and sidewalk celebrating goes through the morning, afternoon, evening, night, and wee hours the next morning until the City's big power street washers show up to clear a solid carpet of trash from the East Carson Street roadway, sidewalks, and some side streets. Over the years, this has been the biggest day of the year for South Side businesses.

In the spring, Pittsburgh Marathon features a route for thousands of half- and full marathoners that proceeds up East Carson Street, PA Highway 837, as the South Side Chamber of Commerce hosts the South Side Cheer Zone that greets marathoners with live bands, lively cheerleaders and signage, special marathon cupcakes and treats, and costumed dancing dinosaurs in demand for popular selfies.

In the summer, OpenStreetsPGH holds a free community event on a Sunday each year that regularly includes miles of East Carson Street/PA Highway 837 for thousands of people of all ages to walk, run, bike, and explore spaces that would otherwise be used by motor vehicles.

In the fall, the annual GAP Relay presented by UPMC Health Plan is a popular team running event that starts or ends on Pittsburgh's South Side, depending on the year. Either way, hundreds of runners come to South Side with their families and friends to participate in the race. South Side has hotels, vacation rentals, parking, and entertainment businesses for those visiting the South Side for this popular race.

### **Nearby Landmarks**

High above PA Highway 837, two remaining funicular railways, the Duquesne Incline and the Monongahela Incline, take you up the South Side hills to the City's best views from the Mt. Washington neighborhood. Alternatively, you can wander the South Side's residential slopes exploring any of the 68 sets of public stairs. Halfway up the slopes are the gardens and grounds of the St. Paul of the Cross Monastery, a quiet spot for reflection and for viewing the South Side business district and Downtown skyline.

The 1,174-foot long Hot Metal Bridge, which once transported molten iron from the South Side blast furnaces across the Monongahela River, now carries the Great Allegheny Passage trail and its travelers. The Three Rivers Heritage Trail welcomes travelers along Pittsburgh riverbanks and features trail wayfinding signage and many great views of Downtown Pittsburgh.

### **The Three Rivers Heritage Trail**

The 24-mile Three Rivers Heritage Trail is a network of urban nonmotorized paths along Pittsburgh's Monongahela, Allegheny, and Ohio Rivers, inviting bicyclists, runners, rollerbladers, and walkers to enjoy views of and access to neighborhood amenities and attractions surrounding Downtown Pittsburgh and Point State Park and including in South Side.

## **The Great Allegheny Passage**

Much of this section about the 150-mile Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) is taken in part from the Great Allegheny Passage website. The GAP runs co-terminously with the Three Rivers Heritage Trail in Pittsburgh's South Side, across the Hot Metal Bridge, and in Downtown Pittsburgh. The entire system is stewarded by Friends of the Riverfront and is widely popular for recreation and commuting.

## **Economic Impact of Tourism on the Great Allegheny Passage**

The [Great Allegheny Passage Conservancy](#) conducts and analyzes annual trail counts along the GAP, and coordinates occasional research about how tourism impacts the regional economy. Tourism along the 150-mile Great Allegheny Passage drove over \$121 million in economic impact in 2019, according to a year-long analysis by Pittsburgh-based consulting firm Fourth Economy. Spending by GAP tourists yielded an estimated \$19 million in tax revenue, with \$8.7 million in tax revenue going back to state, county, and local governments, and it supported nearly 1,400 jobs. The report concludes with a discussion of key opportunities and challenges facing both trail-facing businesses and trail towns along the GAP. [Download the complete report, released in 2021.](#)

Starting in Cumberland, Maryland and ending in Downtown Pittsburgh, the Great Allegheny Passage is a spectacular 150-mile nonmotorized path that soars over valleys, snakes around mountains, and skirts alongside rivers on a nearly-level, crushed-limestone surface. Tracing old footpaths and railroad corridors through the wilderness it makes long-distance trail travel possible between Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.

The Great Allegheny Passage passes through a dozen welcoming trail towns, and South Side is one of them. These trail towns have overnight accommodations that range from lovely bed-and-breakfasts to comfortable guesthouses, and from campgrounds to hotels. Local features include restaurants, bars and grills, creameries and cafés, and festivals and celebrations that take place throughout the seasons for bicyclists and hikers of all ages.

Because of its easy access and many amenities, traveling the Great Allegheny Passage is a sought-after, “bucket list” adventure that delights local users as well as tourists from all 50 states and over 40 countries annually. It receives around a million visits every year, and tourists drive tens of millions of dollars into the local economy. Upon its completion, the GAP was the first path inducted into the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s Rail-Trail Hall of Fame.

**Testimony**  
**to the**  
**House Democratic Policy Committee**  
**Pennsylvania House of Representatives**

**on**

**South Side**  
**Public Safety and Nightlife**

**Pittsburgh, PA**  
**February 8, 2023**

**Statement submitted by**

**Brian Vetere**  
**Owner and Operator**

**Representing**

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Good morning, members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing to address public safety and nightlife in the South Side of Pittsburgh, PA along PA Highway 837.

My name is Brian Vetere and I along with my brother, Frank Vetere, are owners and operators of Carson City Saloon located on PA Highway 837 at 1401 East Carson Street in Pittsburgh, PA. We have been in business here for over 16 years.

The reason we are here today is to discuss the crime problem in the South Side of Pittsburgh. It began to escalate (two) 2 years ago, but especially last summer the issues became out of hand with crime and other bad behavior. This really became a major issue starting on Memorial weekend in May of 2022 and lasting until October of 2022 right when it began to get cold. The first part I will be discussing are the problems as I see it and how I think we can solve the problems. The second part is what the city and their leaders have done about it.

These are some of the major problems that we have encountered last summer that needs to be addressed:

1. There are a lot of underage kids coming into the South Side. And, I am not talking about 20-year-old college kids trying to get into bars. I am talking about 14- or 15-year-old kids just walking the streets smoking weed and drinking alcohol. We have been asking for a curfew for the longest time and nothing has happened.
  - a. We have been asking for a curfew for the longest time and nothing has happened. What are 15-year-old kids doing on the streets of South Side at 1:00 a.m.? We were told they can't be arrested because there is nowhere to put them. The underagers got into the South Side somehow, but they can't get out of the South Side by a reasonable time?

2. Another idea is maybe clear all of the South Side sidewalks and streets at 2:30 a.m. on the weekends. Most of the shootings in South Side happen between 3:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. There are so many people who don't even go into bars, they stand on the streets and drink alcohol, smoke weed, do illegal drugs and even prostitution. It is a nightly occurrence that there will be more people on the streets than inside the bars. They are consuming alcohol and smoking weed on the street, and they are doing it out in the open because they know they will not get into trouble. When I was younger, I knew if I was drinking out in the open on the streets, I would get into trouble, so I never did it. This is a major problem. The Chief of Police and the city officials told us if we saw this bad behavior happening to tell a police officer. Most of the time the police officer says, "I can't do anything about it." Or on the rare occasion when they do say something, the kids don't even care and continue to do it without consequences. They have no respect for authority, and I believe this is the fault of the leadership and maybe more the judges who let these criminals out the very next day with no repercussions. Let them do their jobs. These people are not even stopped by the police and arrested or even questioned. They just let it happen, which it happens every night all over South Side and nothing is ever done about it. I have talked to many police officers about this situation and the general consensus from them is they can't do their job effectively. That is a huge problem.
  - a. We need law and order. Let the police do their job. The leaders are letting the criminals run the asylum. In my view, from talking to police officers it is not the officers' fault. It is the fault of the leadership. We need more officers on duty, but we need them to be allowed to do their job. When a bar or

restaurant violates the law there are consequences. The same standard should be held to any person who violates the law whether it be loitering, drinking alcohol, or smoking weed on the street, and especially carrying an illegal firearm. My brother and I have daughters, and they are way safer inside a bar where it can be regulated than outside on the streets in South Side.

- b. Also, on the issue of parking. I suggest they can take some of the seven percent (7%) liquor tax money that they have been making a fortune on for the last ten (10) or so years and put it into busses that can pick up and take college students from all of the colleges to and from South Side. This will help with the safety of the students and prevent drunk driving. Please look into the amount of money the Port Authority has made from us and see where they are allocating it. I really don't see more buses running in South Side or if they even improved the conditions of the busses.
3. There are some bad establishments in South Side that are causing crime and violence problems to escalate. The problem with these bars is the way they promote their businesses and the sketchy crowds they let in. By doing this, all they do is bring more crime, drugs and bad behavior to the South Side.
  - a. A few of the bad bars have been shut down temporarily or permanently shut down. It did help, but it was too little too late. Magisterial Judge Eugene Ricciardi is one of the very few people to stand with us and fight this crime problem, and I can't thank him enough.
4. Another problem is the way our bars have been treated by the PA Liquor Control Enforcement (LCE.) First off, we had to deal with the South Side blitz for an entire

year. The South Side blitz was a plan by the PA LCE and with the help of the City Fire Department to stop crime and bad behavior in the South Side. The LCE and Fire Department would come into every bar multiples time a night on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays for around a year straight. They would count each customer and see if the bar was over capacity. Which we never were, but this deterred a lot of customers from coming down to the South Side. There was no other area of the city or anywhere else around the area that was hit as hard as the South Side was with the blitz. It was borderline harassment of the bars. They still come in from time to time and they always come in on St Patrick's Parade Day. The LCB and LCE will walk past a 15-year-old kid that is doing drugs and is inebriated and not do anything to them. But, they will come in and harass us if our music is barely heard from the street. And if your music is unfortunately a few decibels too high, they will write you a citation just to show they are doing something.

The leaders of the city have done very little to solve the issues that we are facing in the South Side. We have had over a dozen meetings over the last year about this exact subject, and no actual action to directly address these issues have been taken.

1. The little action the leaders did implement backfired dramatically. An example of this is when the leadership put up barricades on the sidewalks of the street where you used to be able to park. That just forced people not to drive down to the South Side even in the daytime because of the lack of parking. The parking situation in the South Side was already a problem, so that means even less people are coming down.

2. We had meetings with Mayor Gainey about all of starting in June 2022. We thought the meeting with the mayor went very well, but nothing really got done to solve the crime and violence problems in the South Side at night. Before we had the meeting with the mayor, he publicly said he was coming down to the South Side personally to see what the problems were, and he did. But by announcing to the public that he was coming down, none of the problem people came down to South Side when he was here because they knew he was coming. He also did bring extra security with him and to me that does show if we have more police officers on the streets, it would help the problem.
3. City of Pittsburgh Councilman Bruce Kraus said on the news that he blamed the bars, saying that occupancy is a problem. That can't be further from the truth because we are only at one-fourth (1/4) of our capacity. My records indicate that we have not been at capacity occupancy since May 14, 2022. Before the crime escalated, we were at capacity every Friday and Saturday night. Councilman Kraus has been invited to every single meeting that the bar businesses have had, and he failed to show up at any of them.
4. There is a misconception that the bars only care about ourselves, but in reality we also want the residents to feel safe when they walk down East Carson Street at night. We need businesses like the former Fudge Farm to stay open because those types of businesses make the South Side a more inviting place to visit. But, because of the escalated crime and violence, the Fudge Farm closed. It is crazy to me that the city or whomever makes these decisions let people drink and do drugs on the streets, but as soon as they come into a bar, they will try to find any little thing to shut us down.

In conclusion, I can only speak for my brother, Frank, and myself and our business. Our sales are down seventy percent (70%). I had to cut over half of my staff because of the lack of business, and I am still having a really tough time to make payroll. Mark my words, if the crime and violence problems on PA Highway 837 along East Carson Street in the South Side, aren't taken seriously, the second it starts getting warmer outside we are going to have the same nighttime public safety issues as last summer but even more destructive. When that happens most of the businesses in the South Side will shut down and sell if they can even sell at all. When that happens, that is going to start a negative ripple effect that will cross over to the residents of South Side. And they will leave. And in the end you will be looking at a ghost town in the South Side. A once thriving, fun, vibrant, and popular neighborhood, South Side will be turned into a barren wasteland because of the City leadership of South Side and the City of Pittsburgh were too worried about hurting feelings and too scared to effectively get control of crime and violence along PA Highway 837 along East Carson Street in the South Side. We need your help to get more PA resources to improve public safety in the South Side of Pittsburgh, particularly during nighttime hours on Thursdays through Friday nights and for special holidays. Thank you.



**copiesatcarson, inc.**<sup>®</sup>

1315 East Carson Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15203

February 1, 2023

Thank you to this distinguished panel for your time and attention today.

E Pluribus Unum. Out of many, one. Today, I join alongside fellow community stake holders, businessmen and women, owners and employees, landlords, longtime residents and new comers, united as one as we implore you to help us take back our community. We need the resources of many to make our community one, again.

In 1999, when I opened my business, there were several factors that enticed me to open on East Carson Street in the Historic South Side. At that time, there existed an organization, the South Side Local Development company dedicated to the facilitation

“of responsible business, residential, recreational, industrial, and workforce development and provides direction, skills, and technical assistance to other community groups and individuals for the benefit of the South Side community,”<sup>1</sup>

The SSLDC worked tirelessly to ensure the vibrance and stability of the community. Included in their achievements,

- 1985 – East Carson Street is selected to participate in the National Trust’s for Historic Preservation’s Main Street Program as part of the pilot Urban Demonstration Project.
- 1992 – SSLDC completes Edward’s Court -its first residential construction project.
- 1996 – East Carson Street is named a “Great American Main Street” by the National Trust.
- 2003 – SSLDC helps bring the City Theatre to the South Side
- 2003 – SSLDC partners with South Side Works to collaboratively promote the traditional business district and the new development.
- 2005 – SSLDC completes “10 to 1” Master plan focused on the revitalization of area between 1<sup>st</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Streets.
- 2005 – SSLDC partners with TREK Development Group to rehab Beneficial Building on East Carson Street.
- 2005 – 22 New business open in the South Side Works.
- 2006 – SSLDC establishes a Community Benefits Agreement as part of the bid for Pittsburgh’s gaming license to secure funds for a community organizer staff person.
- 2007 – American Eagle moves HQ to South Side Works.

Additionally, the region boasted a mix of both daytime and nighttime economy businesses. By 2002 the vacancy rate for commercial properties, according to an article published by the Post-Gazette was down

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<sup>1</sup> McCollom Development Strategies. (2012). The history of the South Side Local Development Company and its final chapter.

from 60% in 1982 to 7%.<sup>2</sup> The main street corridor and branching streets included a UPMC hospital, a theater, a locally owned grocery store, bookstores, a furniture store, a mix of national chains and independent boutiques and 31 restaurants that served lunch and dinner<sup>3</sup> and a dedicated police station. At this time businesses employed people who supported daytime economy. They shopped in the stores, the ate lunch at restaurants, went to happy hours and then turned the vibrant district over to the stewards of the nighttime economy. Diner owner Brian Kaiser characterizes the symbiosis saying, "In the morning, until 11 a.m., I get senior citizens who come by to socialize. At lunch, I get the businesspeople. And at night, I get the people from the bars,"<sup>2</sup>

Crime rates in the South Side were at a low point. Noting this, acting Pittsburgh Assistant Police Chief William Mullen, who worked as commander of the South Side Station from 1992 to 1996 was quoted in the Post-Gazette as saying, "it's so safe there you don't feel threatened. It was a pleasure to work there. It was one of my favorite duty locations,"

During that span from 1992-2007, more than 125 facades were restored, 150 new businesses moved in, and 600 new jobs were created. In short, the renaissance of the East Carson Street commercial district, along with ongoing residential, retail and office development on the has made the South Side arguably the most eclectic, vibrant, and diversified of the city's 88 neighborhoods.

I share with you this history of revitalization as an example of how focused resources dedicated to a community can make a difference. It is time for a new renaissance. The South Side Community needs to fill it's vacant spaces, promote a collective message, embrace plans that respect the interests of all of the stake holders – business, bars, restaurants, retail, residents and visitors. Our community needs to build a foundation that supports day time economy so that our restaurants may begin to open their businesses for lunch once again. So that there is a demand for daytime shopping. We cannot continue to rely only on nighttime visitors to this community that consume without conscious. This community needs to attract business other than restaurant and hospitality and find a way to support the existing wonderful and eclectic restaurants that currently exist.

I respectfully ask that this panels considers ways for our organization to secure funding to support a dedicated resource to carry on the mission that was set aside when the SSLDC ceased operations in 2012.

Once again, thank you for your time and attention. Please feel free to contact me if you would like to further discuss at [rebecca@copiesatcarson.com](mailto:rebecca@copiesatcarson.com).

Rebecca Kasavich  
Owner,  
Copies at Carson, Inc.

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<sup>2</sup> Fucco, M. A. (2002, July 7). How South Side got its groove back. *Post-Gazette*.

<sup>3</sup> Parrish, M. (2001, August 15) Supping on the South Side, a PG guide from A-Z. *Post-Gazette*.

**Testimony**  
**to the**  
**House Democratic Policy Committee**  
**Pennsylvania House of Representatives**

**on**  
**South Side**  
**Public Safety and Nightlife**

**Pittsburgh, PA**  
**February 8, 2023**

**Statement submitted by**

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**Partner**

**Representing**

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Good morning, members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing to address public safety and nightlife in the South Side of Pittsburgh, PA along PA Highway 837.

My name is James Hoffmann. I am an owner and partner of Mario's South Side Saloon located on PA Highway 837 at 1514 East Carson Street in Pittsburgh's South Side. Mario's South Side Saloon has been at this location for forty (40) years. I have been with Mario's for fifteen (15) years. Mario's has three locations in Pittsburgh. I am a full owner and partner at all three locations.

Mario's South Side Saloon is popular with young professionals and university students with valid identification along with many over 21 local residents and long-time customers. Many South Side flats and slopes residents walk to Mario's.

During the summer of 2022, our business revenue at Mario's in South Side was down 70%. This was due to the increase of crime and violence in the South Side, mostly during the nighttime hours. Crowds of unruly people, mostly underage teenagers, roamed the South Side sidewalks and streets. They openly drank beer and hard liquor and did drugs while walking around. They blasted music and jumped in and out of their cars in front of Mario's and other bars, restaurants, and shops along PA Highway 837. There were fights and shootings. These people who roam the streets do not frequent the businesses in the South Side, they just loiter on the sidewalks and streets and in their cars. There is gang violence. They park in the middle of PA Highway 837 and twerk on top of cars while crowds of other people join them twerking against the car and block traffic on the street.

They walk freely in public areas with open containers and smoke marijuana. They are constantly fighting. This deters people who would normally come to Mario's and other South Side establishments from coming to East Carson Street/PA Highway 837. The local TV news media make it worse for South Side businesses as they always report the crimes and violence in the South Side. A lot of violence occurs late at night at cheap takeout food businesses. The crowds loiter on the sidewalks and streets, eat their

takeout food, and hang around until 3-4 a.m. on Thursday through Sunday nights. They trash the sidewalks and streets and throw takeout food boxes and leftover food on the sidewalks and streets.

It would help if there were a police line at the close of business along East Carson Street/PA Highway 837 every night at 2:30 a.m. This would have a group of officers start at one end of East Carson Street/PA Highway 837 that would form a line from one side of the street to the other and walk as a solid line to tell anyone who continues to loiter on the sidewalks or streets that it is time to go home and make them leave.

There are not enough police officers covering the South Side. Individual bars and restaurants hire their own security officers, some for six (6) days a week. Mario's South Side has a security officer every night we are open. More recently, City police officers do not want to work these special security officer shifts, even if they used to work them. The Enclave night club located on East Carson Street/PA Highway 837 between S. 16-17th Streets, wants to hire security officers but has not found anyone who wants to work security there. Again, a lot of the people roaming South Side streets and sidewalks until 3-4 a.m. are underage teenagers. If police arrest them for violating the law, there is no place to take them. They do not have a place at the Zone 3 Police Station to arrest and hold underaged delinquents. Unfortunately, the Shuman Juvenile Detention Center was closed in 2021. The Shuman Center should be reopened or replaced. Not having a place to take arrested underage delinquents is not the problem of South Side businesses to solve. We need the State's help on this.

All the businesses are concerned about the public safety of their employees who work on the South Side. At the end of late-night shifts, some employees stay inside where they work until most of the sidewalk and street loiterers are gone. The wait staff especially remain targets as they have cash tips when they leave. Some employees have been shot when walking to their cars at the end of shifts.

During the pandemic, some shops opened up as illegal private party venues until 3-4 a.m. A couple of nuisance bars stayed open during the pandemic, followed no rules, and let people run wild on

the South Side. They got away with it. Here we are at post-pandemic, and those wild people are still coming back, but now to the nuisance bars. The problem bars invite problem people. Underage delinquents are attracted to those crowds and hang out on sidewalks and streets around them and cause trouble all over the South Side.

Mario's Saloon is one of the more successful businesses on the South Side, but even we are harmed by the unruly behavior of people who come to the South Side and compromise public safety in our business district. Underage teenagers openly commit crimes and act out violently on East Carson Street/PA Highway 837. Isn't it the State's responsibility to keep PA Highway 837 safe, especially for nighttime businesses that attract huge crowds to the South Side? The nighttime businesses in South Side have the added challenge of demand parking meter fees for their customers who come to the South Side to frequent our businesses and pay to enjoy themselves in our establishments. These extra fees are imposed at metered parking spaces from 6 p.m. to midnight on Thursdays through Sundays. The revenue from the added parking fees that our customers, and sometimes employees, pay is allocated to the South Side Parking Enhancement District that since April 2017 has collected over \$1 Million to pay for a team of workers who clean the sidewalks and streets of East Carson Street/PA Highway 837 every day. In addition, we have residents and volunteers who donate their time to clean up litter and trash on East Carson Street/PA Highway 837. Our South Side community nonprofit organizations help care for and protect the South Side, including securing grants to renovate and redesign a public park on East Carson Street/PA Highway 847 at S. 12th Street. I am here today to tell you that Mario's Saloon in the South Side urges the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to approve funding and resources to improve public safety on East Carson Street/PA Highway 837 in Pittsburgh's South Side. This is the State's highway in our business district. The individual businesses work hard to keep it safe and to keep it clean. The South Side community works hard to keep it safe and to keep it clean. Please,

we need your help and the State's help to keep PA Highway 837 safe and clean in Pittsburgh's South Side. Thank you.