COALITION NEWSLETTER
Coalition of Musicians and Dancers to Eliminate Regulations Against Music and Dancing
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Governor Hochul Plays Fast and Loose with Footloose: Live Music and Dancing Not So Free

Governor Takes Credit for Ending "No Dancing" —
But Dancing Still Prohibited in Thousands of Restaurants and Bars

The Governor: "The state used to demand you get a license to allow dancing, but we tossed that rule out." Not so.

On August 28, 2026, Governor Kathy Hochul released a video with Kevin Bacon, star of the 1984 film Footloose,[1] celebrating the purported end of dancing restrictions at New York bars and restaurants. "The state used to demand you get a license to allow dancing," the Governor says, "but we tossed that rule out."[2]

The press release: "We've eliminated outdated restrictions"

Her press release that day went further: "We've eliminated outdated restrictions on dancing in bars and restaurants to uplift our local businesses and give New Yorkers more opportunities to take advantage of all the great entertainment opportunities we have to offer."[3] The policy she referred to is SLA Advisory 2026-4. Lily Fan, Chair of the New York State Liquor Authority, joined in:
"New York's restaurants, bars, and venues bring people together and fill our communities with energy. Dancing is good for the soul — so let's cut loose and celebrate!"[3]

The fine print: new applications only

On May 28, 2026, the State Liquor Authority issued Advisory 2026-4: the SLA will no longer require or consider patron dancing information in new license applications.[4] Where a method of operation is silent on dancing, dancing is now permitted. The SLA does not state that it will not issue new licenses with patron dancing restrictions.

Thousands of venues: still no dancing

What changed: the SLA stopped asking about patron dancing on new license applications. If a method of operation is silent as to patron dancing, dancing apparently is allowed.

What did not change: existing Method of Operation restrictions on patron dancing remain in effect, over 2,200 in New York City alone and more statewide.

The Governor's claim that she has eliminated outdated restrictions on dancing in bars and restaurants is patently untrue.

What did not change: restrictions on live music, in over 9,400 licenses in New York City alone.

Over 2,200 venues in NYC still may not allow dancing.	A January 2026 SLA dataset, produced in response to our FOIL request, shows that of about 12,000 New York City on-premises licenses: • Over 2,200 expressly prohibit patron dancing. The advisory does not affect them. • Over 9,300 are silent and now benefit from the advisory's apparent "silence equals permission" rule. The SLA was forced to release this database in a FOIL action. The dataset omits about 40% of NYC licenses, so these numbers are understated, and we have rounded them up.[7]
SLA "No Dancing" restrictions in black and white	These are not obscure technicalities. The "No Dancing" conditions are written into each licensee's method of operation in plain language. Here are examples from the SLA database: > *Moon Flower West 11th LLC, 201 W 11th St, Manhattan: "Recorded Music No Dancing, DJ, Live Music"* > *Pergola 36 LLC, 36 W 28th St, Manhattan: "Background Music Only, No Live Music, No Dancing"* > *32 HY Corp, 23 W 32nd St, Manhattan: "No Music and Dancing, Food Served"* Each is legally barred from allowing patron dancing today, whatever the Governor's video implies.
To make dancing free, over 2,200 licensees in NYC must file method of operation change requests.	To remove a restriction, each of the over 2,200 NYC licensees must apply to modify its method of operation, an expensive and cumbersome process in the SLA's archaic paper-based system that still invites the interference of community boards and the dreaded 500-foot law hearing. The policy acknowledges the need for modification but leaves out the fine print. Neither the Governor nor the SLA has disclosed how many licenses explicitly bar dancing. Either their data systems are in such disarray that they do not know, or they do not want the public to know.
Changing a policy is not the same as implementing a policy.	There is a large gap between what the politicians say and what happens. NYC expanded the districts allowing music in 2024, but an analysis of SLA records shows that only 5-10 licensees applied to remove the dancing prohibition from their liquor licenses.
Live music: not even mentioned	The Governor and the SLA continue to ignore the constitutionally protected right to play live music. Over 9,400 licenses in New York City prohibit live music, either explicitly or implicitly.
Footloose was also about live music.	Footloose is remembered as a story about dancing, but it is just as much about live music. In the stage version, Act II opens at the Bar-B-Que, a country-western dance hall outside Bomont, where Cowboy Bob & His Band play live. The young people leave a town where dancing is outlawed, and rock music condemned. That's where Willard finally learns to dance. Live music and dancing feed each other.[5]
The Governor ignored the complete message of Footloose	Audiences move more to, and enjoy more, a live performance than a recording.[6] Allowing dancing while restricting live music leaves out half the message of Footloose and denies New Yorkers the city's musical talent.
Kevin Bacon is a good sport but was he used?	Governor Hochul's video is good theater, and Kevin Bacon is a good sport. But the "No Dancing" conditions in liquor licenses did not vanish. They remain in place, enforceable, and largely invisible, because the SLA, in violation of a specific legislative mandate (ABC Law § 110-c), has not made a dataset of all restrictions readily accessible. Until over 2,200 licenses are individually modified, the Governor's claim that New York "tossed out" the dancing rule is a promise, not a completed act.

Kevin Bacon's band barred from over 9,400 NYC restaurants and bars	As to live music, Kevin Bacon is a musician and has an active band, the Bacon Brothers.[8] Was Bacon aware that his band would be prohibited from playing in over 9,400 restaurants and bars in New York City under current law and policies, and that the Governor is ignoring live music?
Over 9,400 venues: no live music	The Governor and the SLA seem unconcerned about these restrictions, while claiming a desire to "give New Yorkers more opportunities to take advantage of all the great entertainment opportunities we have to offer." They ignore the constitutional right of musicians to play live music, and of New Yorkers to hear live music.
The next steps: free live music, and more.	It is time to: • extend the advisory to live music. • allow live music wherever recorded music is allowed. • amend the 500-foot law to presume live music and patron dancing are in the public interest. • publish full datasets of method of operation restrictions on music and dance. • provide and disclose a dataset of all method of operation change requests. • modernize the method of operation process to allow online applications and the imaging of all related method of operation change documents. • provide expedited rules to process method of operation changes for music and dance.
Notes	1 "Footloose (1984) | Line Dancing & Bar Fighting FULL SCENE," YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBerJrM-uBY 2 Governor Kathy Hochul, "Let's Dance!," YouTube (Aug. 2026), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBk7lS-wjp0 3 Governor Kathy Hochul, press release, "Kick Off Your Sunday Shoes and Get Dancing: Governor Hochul and Kevin Bacon Highlight Policy to Eliminate Outdated Restrictions on Dancing in Bars and Restaurants" (Aug. 28, 2026), https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/kick-your-sunday-shoes-and-get-dancing-governor-hochul-and-kevin-bacon-highlight-policy 4 N.Y. State Liquor Authority, Advisory #2026-4, "Patron Dancing Question for On-Premises License Applications" (May 28, 2026), https://sla.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2026/05/advisory_2026-4_-_patron_dancing_question_for_on-premises_license_applications.pdf 5 Janet Schroeder, "What Is Dance's Relationship with Live Music," Jacob's Pillow Dance Interactive (Nov. 2021), https://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/themes-essays/what-is-dance/what-is-dances-relationship-with-live-music/ 6 Dana Swarbrick et al., "How Live Music Moves Us: Head Movement Differences in Audiences to Live Versus Recorded Music," Frontiers in Psychology 9:2682 (2019), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02682 7 N.Y. State Liquor Authority, Active Liquor License Stipulation dataset, produced January 20, 2026, in response to our FOIL appeal. The production covers 7,311 of about 12,132 New York City on-premises licenses. Based on that dataset, about 2,150 NYC licenses expressly prohibit patron dancing and about 9,320 prohibit live music explicitly or implicitly. Because the production is incomplete, these figures understate the actual numbers; the figures in the text are rounded up. 8 The Bacon Brothers, "Footloose," YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ew5TMQjdzpM; The Bacon Brothers, "Ballad of the Brothers (The Willie Door)," YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50SDeEKX1-I
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