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“DANCE FREE NYC”

DANCE PARADE ANNOUNCES CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT ZONING REFORM TO END PROHIBITION ON DANCING

CURRENT ZONING PERPETUATES SYSTEMIC RACISM. SOCIAL DANCING NEEDS TO BE PROTECTED AS A FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHT

NEW YORK, NY – Dance Parade, New York City’s largest dance event, is supporting efforts through a LegalizeDance.org petition to advocate for Mayor Eric Adams’ *City of Yes* land-use proposal, the first comprehensive zoning reform since 1961. “Dance Free NYC” is seeking to gather 10,000 signatures by February 15 to present at a City Planning Commission hearing scheduled for public input.

Despite the city’s repeal in 2017 of the Cabaret Law, dancing is still prohibited in over 80 percent of New York City due to zoning restrictions. Currently, zoning allows for dancing only in high density commercial and manufacturing districts in venues for over 200 patrons. What this means is smaller venues and clubs appealing and representing LGBTQ, people of color and immigrant cultures aren’t supported.

“Racism is not always conscious, explicit, or readily visible,” explains Shireen Dickson, dance historian and Dance Parade board member. “Systemic racism was entrenched in the 1926 Cabaret Law as a way to control black gatherings at jazz salons in the 1920s, swing dance, tap and even ballroom parlors in the 30’s, 40’s and 50’s and disproportionately affected hip-hop, queer and latinx parties since the 80’s. Even without the Cabaret Law, racism is still today deeply embedded in zoning which will continue to oppress people of color.”

The Adams’ administration is attempting to bring land use restrictions up-to-date by effectively allowing social dance similar to the way live music has been permitted in any bar or restaurant as a First Amendment right.

“It’s about freedom,” says Normal Siegel, the civil rights attorney, “Our right to dance should not be conditioned by the government. If we want to get up and move our bodies to music we should not need permission by the government to do so.”

The Department of City Planning is conducting a 60 day public review process that includes presentations and feedback from 59 community boards in all five boroughs of the city. The City Planning Commission is expected to hold a hearing in February to which interested parties can

submit oral or written testimony. The process will conclude with City Council hearing in the Spring of 2024, and vote to approve or deny the text amendment proposals.

Opponents of the City of Yes reforms cite nuisances from nightlife venues. However, New York City has among the most stringent noise and safety regulations in the country. The situation is urgent, as members of the community boards currently reviewing the reforms are giving in to "Not in my backyard" (NIMBY) arguments that could potentially jeopardize an otherwise promising proposal.

"The community boards should understand that they may unintentionally perpetuate systemic racism by resisting the Department of City Planning's efforts to eliminate barriers that disproportionately affect ethnic minorities," says Ali Coleman, a DJ and event producer who has been an avid nightlife advocate.

To join the "Dance Free NYC" movement in support of responsible zoning reform that preserves our 1st amendment rights, **sign the [petition](#) at [LegalizeDance.org](#).**

"Our city thrives when all cultures can express their traditions," says Jamila Holman, Dance Parade producer and choreographer of the pop star legend, Lisa Lisa. "I count on the support from my community who come together in nightlife venues—it's where up-and-coming artists are discovered, expressing their unique forms of dance and culture."

ABOUT DANCE PARADE NEW YORK:

As the world's only street parade to exclusively celebrate and showcase the diversity of dance, this annual celebration of eclectic dance styles from around the world, features over ten thousand dancers, and presents more than 100 unique styles of dance, including everything from tap to tango, cha-cha to Chinese, featuring live bands and DJs and so much more.

Originally begun as a protest to the over-regulation of dance, the inaugural event came after NYU Law Professor Paul Chevigny and civil rights attorney Norman Siegel represented four groups of dancers in a State Supreme Court case in 2007. The dancers argued that the 1926 Cabaret Law was an infringement on their First Amendment right of expression by requiring venues to hold a dancing license, and that no government should be entitled to require a license for dancing.

The organization became a 501(c) organization with a mission to celebrate diversity by presenting as many expressive forms of dance and culture as possible. Dance Police playfully ticket bystanders for "no moving violations" as a parody to the Cabaret Task force that fined and shuttered nightlife venues due to dancing in the 1990s. Today the organization offers dozens of free dance programs to schools and community centers throughout New York City. Students culminate their programs with participation in the annual dance parade and festival. This year's Dance Parade and Festival is on Saturday, May 18.

Social dance is a powerful vehicle for connection and self-expression, allowing individuals to celebrate their cultural heritage and unique identities," said Palestinian American dancer Janelle Issis.

For a Media Kit including high resolution photos and more information about Dance Parade and our education programs please visit <https://danceparade.org/media-kit-releases/>

ABOUT LEGALIZEDANCE.ORG

Since 2005, the members of [LegalizeDance.org](https://legalizedance.org) have supported the repeal of the NYC 1926 Cabaret Law and the zoning restrictions on dance that unfairly have been applied to marginalized communities, suppressing culture in predominantly black, hispanic and LGBTQ+ communities as well as suppressing nightclub culture and ethnic communities across all five boroughs of New York.

“It’s a freedom protected under the First Amendment and it needs safeguarding,” said Jerry Goldman, Dance Parade Board chair. “From hip-hop in the Bronx to swing dancing in Harlem, from Indian classical dances in Queens to Polka in Greenpoint, these gatherings are essential to our cultural fabric.”

The coalition of advocates, nightlife venues and dance enthusiasts worked with activist partners in 2017 to support City Council Member Raphael Espinol in his bill to successfully repeal the Cabaret Law and is currently leading the advocacy to reform New York City’s zoning laws as well as the repressive regulations by the New York State Liquor Authority’s suppression of dance and culture through its licensing requirements.

“It’s ridiculous that in 2023 New York City still has rules on the books prohibiting people from dancing at their local restaurants and bars,” said Andrew Rigie, Executive Director, NYC Hospitality Alliance.

LegalizeDance.org is a project of Dance Parade. For further background, press articles and videos documenting the history of dance regulation in New York City, visit <https://legalizedance.org>.

ABOUT THE MAYOR’S PLAN TO PERMIT DANCING IN THE CITY OF YES

The *City of Yes* initiative will be the first comprehensive zoning law reform since 1961 when New York City was largely a manufacturing economy. The plan will modernize and update the city’s zoning regulations to support small businesses, create affordable housing, and promote sustainability — part of Mayor Eric Adams’ vision for New York to become more inclusive and equitable. The plan includes three major citywide amendments (*Zoning for Economic Opportunity*, *Zoning for Housing Opportunity*, and *Zoning for Zero Carbon*); an effort to invest in and plan around emerging job hubs and commercial corridors in all five boroughs and initiatives to cut red tape and center equity in planning.

Under *Zoning for Economic Opportunity*, updates are proposed to regulate dancing as ‘scheduled entertainment’ to allow bars and restaurants to permit poetry, comedy and incidental dancing to be in line with how live music is already permitted as a 1st Amendment Right. Stringent fire safety codes would remain in place which are tied to a building’s zoning district and venue capacity.

For more information on the City of Yes plans, visit <https://www.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/city-of-yes/city-of-yes-overview.pag>