

Official MaCCNO Statement: Proposed Citywide Safety Plan Invites Profiling, Damages Culture

“Misguided” would be a charitable assessment of the proposed ‘Citywide Public Safety Plan’. But this is a time for truth, not charity, and the truth is that the plan is disturbing, vague, and fraught with threats to New Orleans’ culture.

Unsurprisingly, after a successful smoking ban and failed noise ordinance, the portion of plan receiving the most attention is the 3 A.M. citywide “doors closed” policy for bars, music venues, and all other alcoholic beverage outlets. Not only would this impact the culture of a city that prides itself on its 24 hour scene, it would hurt business owners and workers in the cultural and service industries economically. However, most concerning is the idea that law enforcement would “encourage” patrons to get off the streets, inviting enforcement bias and racial profiling. How differently might a 50 year old White female visitor on Bourbon Street be “encouraged” as opposed to a 22 year old Black male in Central City? With many of the City’s primarily Black and Latinx service workers--as well as many musicians--leaving work between 3 and 7 A.M., what kind of “encouragement” might they face? Other initiatives, including the use of unspecified “remote sensory” equipment, K9 units in the French Quarter, and the requirement that all ABO’s provide the NOPD access to a live feed from mandatory exterior security cameras, besides compromising civil liberties, could also lead to additional instances of selective enforcement and racial profiling.

Culturally, beyond the 3 A.M. rule, this plan could potentially cause irreversible changes to the city, particularly in the French Quarter. We can’t help but note that many locations studied to create the plan, including Times Square, Beale St, and London’s Soho, are widely seen as culturally ‘sanitized’ and ‘homogenized’, packaged for easy and unchallenging consumption by visitors. We fail to see what much of this plan has to do with crime reduction at all—rather it looks to be a form of ‘disaster capitalism’, using the fear of crime to force through policies that will be widely unpopular. We haven’t forgotten, just one year ago, when several businesses used the ‘fear of terrorist attacks’ to justify an attempt to end the 45 year old Royal St. Pedestrian Mall, which would have been devastating to the income of many buskers—some of whom are prominently featured in tourism campaigns. Despite being included in a ‘safety plan’, we know that limiting amplification by street performers, for instance, will have exactly zero impact on violent crime.

Rather than a crime prevention plan, this is largely a blueprint for unconstitutional surveillance and cultural commodification. It seems poorly conceived, reactionary, and intentionally ambiguous. Long term impacts have not been taken into account, and there has been no public input, except for individuals who were hand picked by the plan’s architects. Indeed, crime is a serious problem in New Orleans, and one that deserves increasing action and attention—which this administration has made

strides in through programs like NOLA for Life and real investments in workforce and economic development. So it is surprising that this plan is so misguided—the French Quarter would receive the bulk of the resources but is, statistically, one of the safest areas of the City, and the hours of 3 to 7AM, when bars would have to close their doors, already see the least need for police activity. We firmly believe that we can lower the crime rate while staying respectful of people’s constitutional rights AND still be supportive the city’s culture. Unfortunately, this proposal seems to be taking the opposite approach.