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Why I oppose the lockout laws

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To: Liquor Law Review; ▾

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Saved submissions

I am a 62 year old woman. Because of a physical disability I am no longer in the paid workforce. Luckily I am pretty close to paying off my small flat in one of the Cross's 1920s buildings, so I'm unlikely to be forced out by developers forcing rents up. As a pensioner these days, I reflect the longer- term demographic of working class and poor inhabitants of Kings Cross.

I moved here not long after the injecting room opened in 2001. In terms of improvements to the area, that wins hands down. The virtual disappearance of syringes from the street and lanes was the least of the good things that resulted. The most important was the saving of lives, and some degree of dignity which had previously been denied to people having to shoot up in the back streets.

I found myself singing the praises of Kings Cross to friends and family once I moved here. The strip joints and sex clubs will remain tragic, but it was easy to dispel some other aspects of the Cross's reputation. I have never felt safer in my neighbourhood than walking home from the station late on a Friday or Saturday night with the streets full of young people having a good time. It was the presence of so many people that made me feel much *more* secure than walking home along the poorly lit suburban streets where I grew up.

As my flat backs onto a lane, before 2014 I would often hear young people on the street below me "pre-loading" with cheap drinks from the bottle shop before going to one of the exorbitantly-priced clubs. Good luck to them, I say. I can remember what it was like to be young and poor. Sometimes they were noisy. No problem, I like the sounds of human life. Mostly they were gone to other haunts before midnight. If not, I would stick my head out the window and explain that there were places further down the lane with no residential buildings where they wouldn't disturb anyone. I got some interesting conversations out of this, but never did any of them refuse to move.

Since the liquor laws have come in, all this has changed - and not in a good way. I arrived home last night (Sunday) at 9pm and the place was like a ghost town. This did not make me feel safe, quite the opposite. And it made me feel sad - not for the millionaire hotel owners, about whose fortunes I couldn't give a toss, but for the constraining of another avenue for entertainment for the mass of ordinary people. The daily grind of work doesn't offer us much of that.

Partly I am motivated to write this submission - not something I have often done - in order simply to dissociate myself from the appalling NIMBY wowers of the 2011 Residents Association Inc. I can't stand those posh types who have always hated the diversity of the Cross, even though they chose to live in it. Alongside them are the more recent wave of wealthy

gentrifiers whose motto seems to be "I've bought this wonderful million dollar apartment. The only thing wrong is the dreadful people all around it". They love the lockout laws as a way to keep the "bogans" out (what a vile elitist term that is). Personally, it's *these* people that I don't want to associate with. Unlike them, I'm not trying to wage a campaign of social cleansing.

In addition, I am not in any way reassured by the presence of more police in Kings Cross. Has everyone forgotten the terrible street violence by the police in 2012 when they shot two unarmed Aboriginal boys in a car on Darlinghurst Road?

No wonder the police have been fanning the moral panic about "coward punches". It justifies the normalisation of their intrusive presence in more and more aspects of life, from replacing some of the transit officers on the trains (one of my brothers lost his job as a result of this) to the damn sniffer dogs being used to harass people on the streets. The NSW Council for Civil Liberties have produced plenty of material about what's wrong with sniffer dogs from a civil liberties perspective.

Finally, I'll conclude with my hostility to another attack on civil liberties that has been generated by the lockout laws and that is the additional surveillance of ordinary people as we go about our lives. There's too much already, especially for Muslims whose rights are constantly trampled on under the guise of anti-terrorism. Now, if I want a late meal at my local, I have to be carded and photographed. I await the fingerprinting - or has that already happened?