

Video: The Globe reporter who wrote the viral story about the Greenfield lesbian bar explains the controversy

By [Anush Elbakyan](#) Globe Staff, Updated September 24, 2026, 9:33 a.m.



A sign encourages patrons to wear a mask outside Last Ditch Bar and Arts Venue, a mask-mandatory lesbian bar in Greenfield, Mass. on Sept. 16, 2026. Last Ditch recently introduced a mask-optional night to help stay afloat. This move sparked significant online backlash from the long-COVID community, who called them eugenicist, racist, ableist, and so on. Sophie Park/for the Boston GLOBE

[When a lesbian bar in Greenfield, Mass.](#), changed the rules in late August about their KN-95 mask requirement, they got a firestorm. Reporter Annalisa Quinn explains what happened.

How did a mask policy cause an internal war at a small-town lesbian bar?

The Last Ditch Bar in Greenfield, Massachusetts tried to avoid closure by relaxing its COVID-19 mask policy one night a week, but was met with fierce backlash. (Video by Von Smith/Globe Staff)

The August 31 Instagram post from Last Ditch Bar and Arts Venue, a lesbian bar in Greenfield, was upbeat, teasing a new DJ lineup and a volunteer meetup. But partway down the rainbow-hued [post](#) labeled “UPDATES!” was a sentence that would splinter the queer community in this small Pioneer Valley city and beyond.

“It is with love we inform our immunocompromised disabled divas we will be opening Saturday nights as mask *optional*,” wrote Last Ditch.

Previously, patrons were required to wear a well-fitted KN-95 mask “or better” at all times.

The new policy was not received with love.

“Just say you’re being complicit in a mass disabling event and get it over with,” wrote one commenter.

“people like you kill disabled people in the name of your own leisure and convenience,” posted another.

“I hope your venue gets firebombed for robbing my fellow immunocompromised people of their Saturday plans just to scrape extra revenue from ablists [sic],” wrote a third.

The thread grew to 442 comments, some supportive, but many furious. The people running the bar were accused of being ableist — eugenicist, even — for relaxing their signature policy in the face of what commenters consider an ongoing pandemic (Greenfield [hasn’t reported any COVID cases](#) in more than two months).

Two days later, Last Ditch posted [an apology](#). “We are sorry for our passive and dismissive tone of our change to the norms and schedule impacting the most intersectional of us,” management wrote on Instagram. “We understand everyone faces different intersections and we are always working to consider all needs fully.”

Instead of defusing the situation, the apology seemed to make things worse. The bar had erred: it posted an Instagram card without providing alt-text for the visually impaired. This set off a fresh round of accusations of ableism.

“This is not an accessible post,” wrote one user. “It indicates the lack of care or interest in Disability intersectionality.”



Left: A sign at the entrance to Last Ditch Bar and Arts Venue, a lesbian bar in Greenfield, asks patrons to wear a mask. The awning above the door was embroidered by hand. Sophie Park/for the Boston GLOBE

Quaint, crunchy Greenfield (population 17,700) isn’t a bad place for a COVID-cautious lesbian bar in 2026, all things considered. Rainbow flags deck store windows downtown. On a recent weekend, a community theater was advertising a workshop

for masked performers, down the street from a bookstore with a “medical masks required” sign in the window. Men in ponytails and N-95s were ordering hibiscus tea from the coffee shop off the main square.

Greenfield is close, both physically and spiritually, to Northampton, sometimes referred to as “Lesbianville, U.S.A.” In the Pioneer Valley, “every bar is a lesbian bar,” a friend who lives there told me.

Nevertheless, [Last Ditch](#), which opened last year as a bar for “dykes, transsexuals, gender freaks, workers, and their friends,” is struggling.

Three housemates in their mid-20s opened it together, hoping to fill the void left by two local queer bars that had shuttered. One of the trio, Asa Rosario, a drag performer who uses it/its pronouns, envisioned a venue where it and its friends could perform.

The three were intentional about the kind of values they wanted to bring to the divey basement bar, which they decorated with discoveries from Facebook Marketplace and pieces from local artists. No one would be turned away from the space for lack of funds. “Poor and unhoused people are welcome in the space.” [The police were not.](#)

“Our mission is to create systems of care and action and aid,” says Jackie Matellian, one of the founders.

When it first opened, Last Ditch did fairly well. Customers fondly remember a raucous opening night with a (clothed) simulation of a lesbian sex act — masks in place — on the dance floor.

But over time, foot traffic to the bar slowed. More and more visitors said they didn’t have the cover fee; the bar let them in anyway. The owners fell behind on bills and couldn’t pay themselves or the people who worked there. So, after consulting with the Massachusetts LGBT Chamber of Commerce, they came up with a plan to bend one of their rules — and hopefully attract more customers.

But by the time of Last Ditch’s monthly community meeting on September 11, only one of the original founders, Matellian, is still involved. The two others stepped back from the daily operation months before, Matellian says, citing various pressures and health issues. One had enrolled in clown school.



Jackie Matellian, 26, the owner of Last Ditch, poses for a portrait outside the bar.

There are some 10 people, seated in a circle on the dance floor, all wearing masks: Matellian, a handful of volunteers, some bar patrons, and two designated mediators who will facilitate conversations between parties who disagree. Another 10 or 15 people join the meeting via Zoom. The plan is to go clockwise, sharing views on the masking decision and the financial future of the bar. Each person has two minutes to speak. It begins with a calming breath exercise.

Almost immediately, the proceedings are derailed.

One of Last Ditch's most vocal critics, the head of another queer COVID-conscious collective in Western Massachusetts, a performer and artist who goes by Soe Noire, has been posting complaints about Last Ditch for days. Now, Noire joins the meeting on Zoom. He and other critics begin to flood the Zoom chat with irate messages, which are dutifully read aloud to the group.

When it comes time for one of the mediators, a licensed therapist, to speak, she takes a conciliatory tone.

"I love that you are here online," she says. But "these platforms alienate us from each other. I'm talking about social media." She asks whether participants can try to remove themselves from "places of righteousness."

"I would love to get to a place where we all know each other's face, where we all know each other's name," she continues.

"It's messed up that the mediator is dismissing those attending virtually. That's not accessibility," someone responds in the chat.

"A lot of people are calling for an acknowledgment of harm and I'm hearing a WHITE therapist ... center[ing] the feelings of a majority white and white adjacent staff," writes Noire, who is Black.

Moreover, the Zoom attendees speculate that the mediator's licensed status makes her a mandated reporter — an agent of the state, akin to police. One person going by "Moss" asks if the mediator could have them hospitalized against their will, adding that her presence is "wildly unsafe."



Jackie Matellian talks with Meaghan Cuevas during a karaoke night in September.

When Matellian's turn comes to speak, she begins haltingly. She had never envisioned running Last Ditch alone. "It was not my passion project," she says. "My main goal was to support Sage and Asa," the other two founders. Her voice cracks.

"I never really wanted to do this," Matellian says, beginning to cry under her mask. "I don't think I'm doing a very good job."

Matellian tells the group her credit score is trashed. For six months, she lived in her truck because she was pouring money into the bar. She is working four different jobs. She is responsible for paying off the \$50,000 loan the three took out to launch the business.

The online critics are unmoved. "[Y]ou chose to use your time to spill tears and center your feelings," Noire posts in the chat. "This is incredibly racist and deflecting behavior."

Eventually, after 3½ hours of discussion, the meeting wraps up. Noire has more to say, but when someone suggests he come to the next community meeting, he refuses. "There's a lot of emotional and physical labor that goes into this, so for you as a white person that asks for me to stay for another meeting for free," he says, is "incredibly disingenuous and racist. I'm not doing that."

"Then I think, unfortunately, this meeting has failed you," replies a facilitator, "and I'm sorry."

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The in-person participants file up the metal stairs, past the native plant garden, and out to their cars. Little has been resolved. Last Ditch's landlord wants \$3,900 in back rent by Monday.

Noire spends the hours after the meeting posting furious Instagram stories about Matellian and Last Ditch. Matellian (who uses she/they pronouns) had been shedding "WHITE THEY THEM TEARS," he writes. The bar was not "a safe environment nor interested in revolutionary praxis."



Books and zines in the Greenfield bar's library. Sophie Park/for the Boston GLOBE

I reach Noire, who identifies as a gender-expansive lesbian and uses he/him pronouns, by Zoom a few days later. I ask whether he has any sympathy for those running Last Ditch, given the profound financial strain they are under. “No,” he replies. (Noire asked to be referred to by his stage name because he says he has been stalked and fears for his safety.) “I’m not going to give grace” when someone is “spreading rhetoric that can and will get people hurt,” he says, referring to the fact that the bar’s account had “liked” a few comments supporting the relaxed rule.



Moreover, the mask policy change promotes “these ableist ideas that disabled people, immunocompromised people, should either risk their health or just be pushed out of spaces,” he says.

Noire, who lives about 50 minutes south of Greenfield, estimates he has visited the bar seven or eight times. But he won’t return unless there is new leadership. “You can’t repair a house that’s on fire,” he says.

Left: Kat “DJ Kouch” O’Brien sings a Third Eye Blind song at Last Ditch in Greenfield. Sophie Park/for the Boston GLOBE

Saturday, September 12, is the second weekly mask-optional night at Last Ditch.

Down a set of stairs, in a small concrete courtyard, a few people mill outside smoking. Another handful linger inside near the bar, under string lights. The dance floor, a wide checkered expanse with a stripper pole at the center, is empty.

Matellian is one of the few people wearing a mask; I talk with her and another volunteer, Melody Young, in a small library tucked inside an alcove by the bar, filled with zines and lesbian classics such as *Stone Butch Blues*. This is also their “free store,” which carries food, clothes, fentanyl test strips, Narcan, literature about STIs, and other supplies. Above us hangs a sign: “PROM CANCELLED ’CUZ LESBIANS.”

I remember a comment on Last Ditch’s original announcement, after the pile-on had begun: @scream_guy_wazzzuuuuuup asked, “i’m sorry, all 400 of these crazy people live in GREENFIELD MASSACHUSETTS????”

I ask whether the people behind the angriest posts have genuine connections to the bar — are they real customers?

Young and Matellian say yes, they know many of the detractors.

“There are people that are close to us and love us who are really disappointed in our decision, and that is completely understandable,” says Young, who says her sister is one of the vocal critics online. “Like, it’s so understandable why they feel hurt by the way we did it and the fact that we did it.”

“They have passion for the space,” Matellian adds.

A number of people on Instagram also said they were excited to visit the space unmasked. But this night, the hoped-for other patrons haven’t materialized, despite \$10 cocktails and sternum-shivering dance tracks from DJ Harsh Noise Boyfriend.

At the queer bar that occupied this space before Last Ditch (where masks were not required), a night like this might have drawn a hundred people, estimates Mixxy, the bartender on duty that night. A trans woman with thick black eyeliner and catlike poise, Mixxy is closeted in her day job as an engineer. She loves the bar enough to work for just tips, knowing Last Ditch is in the red. But she thinks the early dogmatism about masks was a mistake. People don’t like to feel scolded, she says. “That’s not how hospitality works.”



The Last Ditch's "free store." Sophie Park/for the Boston GLOBE

Just after midnight, one patron is left at the bar, a regular who works at the Mexican restaurant next door. She wonders aloud about holding a Lady Gaga themed night, but Mixxy demurs. "Gaga is canceled," she says. "Gaga is Zionist."

The DJ is still playing EDM, and Matellian is alone on the checkered dance floor, making pensive, graceful loops on the stripper pole, KN-95 mask in place.

Matellian doesn't expect the conflict at Last Ditch to end soon. She plans to co-operatize the bar, so she doesn't bear so much financial liability, but that will come with its own challenges. And the discord about masking is unlikely to go away.

But it comes with the territory, she says. "There's conflict, but we just hope that there's more repair than conflict."

"That's the price you pay to be in community," Matellian says.

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