

More Strippers File Lawsuits

With a flurry of lawsuits, strip clubs like Boston's Centerfolds might have to change the way they do business. Photo by [AntyDiluvian](#).

A welcome change might be coming to the way that strippers in Massachusetts get paid. Following an August [decision](#) that strippers at King Arthur's Lounge in Chelsea were improperly classified as independent contractors, a [new lawsuit](#) has made the same claim for a group of strippers in Salisbury. Depending on how this lawsuit shakes out, it could mean that strippers across the state will begin being classified as regular employees, with more robust rights.

Currently, strippers are considered unpaid "contractors" at most of the clubs in Massachusetts and the rest of the country. That means that strip clubs don't pay wages—the strippers make their living exclusively through customers' tips—and, in most cases, they even require strippers to pay a fee just to perform on stage, never mind that strip clubs have customers primarily because strippers work there. As attorney Shannon Liss-Riordan illustrated it, "[Imagine a restaurant where a waiter has to pay to come to work.](#)"

It's a profoundly unfair system, and, in the current economy, it has gotten worse. Many strip clubs have increased their stage fees, reducing dancers' take-home pay, and some, like Ten's Show Club in Salisbury, the defendant in the more recent lawsuit, have even charged penalty fees for tardiness or other infractions of company policy, like wearing the wrong outfit on stage.

Luckily for local strippers, Massachusetts has some of the most stringent laws in the country governing independent contractors. Unlike other states, Massachusetts holds that if a person looks like an employee and acts like an employee, that's what she is. In the earlier case, King Arthur's Lounge made the dubious claim that its primary business was selling alcohol and that strippers were "extra entertainment" like a television at a sports bar. (We'll get back to you next time we see soused Sox fans tossing dollar bills at the screen in the Brendan Behan.) That argument didn't fly in Suffolk County, and it probably won't fly in Essex, either.

If the new lawsuit succeeds, expect a flurry of new lawsuits and some quick changes to the strip club-stripper relationship. Strippers, like you or Bostonist, want their fundamental workplace rights—Social Security and Medicare payments, overtime if they work it, and protection against discrimination and harassment. It will be a credit to our state if we can give that to them.

