

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER PROTECTION

IN THE MATTER OF

Rumba Café Bar and Grill
679 Main Street
East Haven, CT 06512
Paul R. Matute, Permittee
Ecuadorian Investment Group, Backer
Permit No. LCA.7101

March 13, 2024

SUMMARY SUSPENSION ORDER

This premises operates under a cafe liquor permit issued by the Department of Consumer Protection (“DCP”). It operates under the trade name “Rumba Café Bar and Grill,” and is also known as “Rumba Café” and “Rumba.” The permit was first issued by DCP on July 29, 2009 and has been renewed annually, with the current permit set to expire on January 27, 2025. Paul Matute became permittee and assumed majority ownership of the backer in 2015.

We find that on March 10, 2024, Rumba Café was the scene of a shooting and multiple active fights within and within the vicinity of the establishment. This incident closely follows other incidents at or near the premise, including a shooting in the rear parking lot of the premise on October 10, 2021 during which a volley of eighteen rounds was exchanged.

Specifically, in a letter to DCP dated March 12, 2024, East Haven Deputy Chief of Police Patrick Tracy states that on March 10, 2024 at approximately 1:39 a.m., an East Haven police officer assigned to “bar closing detail” on Main Street heard several gunshots at Rumba Café. Deputy Chief Tracy submitted a case/incident report stating that the officer observed two males in an altercation with security staff in front of the establishment, observed them walking behind the establishment, and then heard three gunshots from the rear of Rumba Café. Responding officers observed a large crowd dispersing from Rumba Café. The resulting investigation determined that the gunshots were fired inside the premise and into the ceiling; no occupants of the apartments above the premise were injured. Video evidence of the incident shows that a man was inside the premise with a firearm. A police K9 unit found two firearms hidden under a trashcan on the adjoining property; further investigation determined that these firearms had been reported as stolen from out of state. No shooting victims were found on the premise. The man brandishing the firearm and another male were arrested.

Deputy Chief Tracy additionally noted in his letter that “such instances of violence at Rumba Café are not isolated ones.” He wrote that “incidents involving violent behavior” have resulted in serious injuries to some victims. Specifically, Deputy Chief Tracy noted twenty-three other instances since April 3, 2021 where police either conducted a drug investigation (involving the controlled purchase of narcotics) or responded to calls pertaining to breach of peace (including fights and unruly crowds), assaults (such as fights), and the unlawful discharge of a firearm on October 10, 2021. As a result of these incidents at and within the vicinity of Rumba Café, East Haven police must assign a “bar closing detail,” which places officers in the vicinity to deter illegal activity. Despite these efforts, the activity at Rumba Café continues to necessitate police intervention.

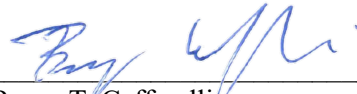
By way of example, Deputy Chief Tracy specifically notes an investigation into the discharge of eighteen bullets in the parking lot behind Rumba Café. On October 10, 2021, a physical altercation occurred inside the premise; the individuals exited into the parking lot and exchanged gunfire before leaving the scene. Police found eighteen spent shell cases in the parking lot, including in three uninvolved vehicles - one occupied by a woman and her child – and in the window of a neighboring McDonalds.

As Deputy Chief Tracy summarized, “[t]his continued illegal activity at Rumba Café has been a constant drain on police resources and has taken officers away from patrolling other areas of town.” He explains that summary suspension is needed because of “the serious violence that has occurred, the threat to public safety, and the drain on police resources.”

We find that the March 10, 2024 shooting and multiple fights inside the premise, in conjunction with the serious parking lot shooting in 2021 and the numerous other police incidents at or near the premise, demonstrates that the premise is operated in a manner that imperils public safety and highlights the need for better control of the premise by the permittee, backer, or their agents.

Based upon the foregoing, DCP finds that public health, safety and welfare imperatively requires emergency action, in accordance with section 4-182 (c) of the Connecticut General Statutes, and **ORDERS** your cafe liquor permit **suspended immediately and premises closed** pending proceedings for revocation or other action.

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Bryan T. Cafferelli
Commissioner of Consumer Protection
Chairperson, Liquor Control Commission