

New underage drinking law holds parents, adults accountable for underage drinking house parties

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Across the country, laws are being passed to put an end to the underage drinking parties in which adults provide the booze. Alcohol kills 6.5 times more young people than all illegal drugs combined. It's a factor in nearly half of all teen car crashes and up to 65 percent of teen suicides. It's linked to two-thirds of all sexual assaults and date rapes of teens and college students. And most underage drinking happens at somebody's house, a house that's invariably owned by an adult.

These so-called "Social Host Ordinances" recently made national headlines as more and more communities want to hold adults and property owners accountable for out-of-control underage drinking parties causing a disturbance. In Ventura County, California, people having unruly underage drinking parties will be fined \$1,000 if law enforcement is called to break it up. If they are called again to the same property with the same host within a year, the person can be forced to pay for the cost of police services.

PIRE legal policy research and lawyer Stacy Saetta developed the model Social Host Ordinance being used in Ventura County as well as other communities across the country. Currently, cities and counties in Oregon, Illinois, Nebraska, New Mexico and Nevada are considering similar laws. Legislation recently passed in communities in Oklahoma, New Jersey and Wisconsin, among others.

"It's not an attempt to stop all parties, just the ones where underage drinking occurs," said Stacy Saetta, legal policy researcher with PIRE's Center for the Study of Law and Enforcement Policy in Felton. "The law will serve as a deterrent rather than a punishment. Because of the civil penalties involved, parents and other adults will think twice before opening their homes to underage drinkers."

Another effort to promote Social Host Ordinances as a way to prevent underage drinking is the campaign "Not In Our House." This program, developed in partnership with the International Institute for Alcohol Awareness (IIAA), The Century Council, and Scholastic, was launched in October 2006 in schools across all 50 states. The educational format teaches adults about the civil and criminal liabilities of providing alcohol to underage youth.

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