

Public Testimony before the Joint Committee on Judiciary  
Friday, Feb.24, 2006

**IN SUPPORT OF HB.5211, An Act Concerning Underage Drinking  
Presented by Geralyn Laut, President  
The Glastonbury Alcohol and Drug Council (GLAD)**

*My name is Geralyn Laut, I'm the parent of two teenagers, I have been a long time active member and am the current president of the Glastonbury Alcohol and Drug Council, I serve on the Board of Directors of ERASE, the Regional Action Council serving Glastonbury and 14 towns east of the river, I am a member of the Glastonbury Advisory Council for the Rushford Center, and I am a former member of the Leadership Council of the Connecticut Coalition to Stop Underage Drinking.*

I've been here before, and for those of you who supported HB 6901 introduced last year, or a variation of the same bill that has been introduced in the 3 prior years, I thank you for your support and concern for the harmful and often fatal results of underage drinking. Today, I challenge you to insure that THIS YEAR, HB 5211 is enacted into law, sooner than later. My colleagues in prevention, who have come before me, have done a good job of enlightening you about the alarming facts and figures associated with underage drinking. I'm going to operate on the premise that a picture is indeed worth a thousand words. Before you, are photographs of 5 young people who have died as a result of drinking alcohol. Two died in the driveway of a house in Glastonbury on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1998, Their murder served as the "grand finale" so to speak of a keg party at an unsupervised house party, hosted by a 17 year old whose mother was away for the weekend. That tragic event is what sparked my friend and colleague Sheryl Sprague and I to embark upon a grass roots effort to reduce the incidence of underage house parties in Glastonbury, through what has become known as the Party Line Pledge. It is an informal contract / pledge which has been signed by over 3000 parents, who have committed to insuring that any teen gathering at their home, or to which they knowingly allow their teenager to attend is alcohol free and supervised by a responsible adult. Upon hearing of our initiative to reach out to parents, Agent Keith O'Brien of the Glastonbury Police Department commended us for our efforts, admonishing the fact that at that time, when the police were called to the scene of an underage house party involving alcohol, or an outdoor gathering on private property, their hands were tied, for unless there had been some other associated crime or physically harmful consequence, they were in essence

unable to take legal action against minors in possession of alcohol, when on private property. In addition, unless the host had in fact provided / purchased the alcohol being consumed, that individual was in no way liable. Those of us hearing this, questioned the validity of his words, and came to find out that the current language in Sec.30-86 prohibiting possession of alcohol by minors, referred to public places or public highways only. Members of the Glastonbury Alcohol and Drug Council spearheaded our local effort to amend the town code to include what has become known as “the ordinance”, modeled after a similar ordinance passed in Cheshire in 1986. I am proud to say, as you have heard , 47 Connecticut towns have followed suit, and I have personally visited at least 10 of those communities advocating for it’s passage.

The other picture before you, is of three Glastonbury High School students who died on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2002, along with an innocent young father of three children, the result of a tragic car crash. All three of the teens were found to be under the influence of alcohol and at least two were in possession of fake ID’s, so presumably this was not their first encounter with alcohol, but regrettably their last. Would a law such as HB 5211 have saved these young people??? MAYBE, and that’s good enough reason for me. These three young boys were good athletes and college bound kids.... If they had a reason to be afraid of getting caught “red handed”, if they feared getting arrested and subsequently getting expelled from a team, or jeopardizing their chances of getting into the college of their choice, if they knew there were legal and or financial consequences to their actions, then maybe they would have been discouraged from drinking that day and the other occasions leading up to that fateful night. Maybe they would be graduating from college next year... As members of the so called “Judiciary Committee”, I’m assuming you will agree that laws are intended to protect people and at the same time to encourage people to do what is right. I believe HB 5211 will do both. The results of a national study known as Community Trials on Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws, clearly demonstrates, that the higher the perception of risk of “getting caught by the police” , the lower the incidence of underage drinking and or drinking and driving. Seven communities in Connecticut are a part of that study, and are focusing their efforts on increasing local enforcement and implementing policy initiatives intended to reduce youth access to alcohol. With the encouragement of the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention,

four of the 7 towns have also passed their own local ordinance concerning underage drinking and it is currently under consideration in Torrington.

Oh... before I end, I have two more pictures to show you, Rebecca age 19 and Erica age 16. These are my daughters, and if they go to a party in Glastonbury, or any other town for that matter, I want to make sure that any person, be it a peer or another parent, who knowingly chooses to allow either of them to consume alcohol without the presence and consent of either their father or myself, will be held criminally liable. I made sure that was indeed the case in Glastonbury; I need your support to help me insure their safety and well being if and when they venture elsewhere!.

Now, picture in your mind all the young people between the ages of 11 and 21 that you know personally, and make a mental note of how you are going to vote.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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