

CT PREVENTION NETWORK

Helping prevent substance abuse in our communities

Re: HB (Raised) 5211, An Act Concerning Underage Drinking

CPN

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

CASAC
(860) 286-9333
mfreedman@casac.org

CNVRAC
(203) 578-4044
jdewitt.fic@sbcglobal.net

CTFA
(860) 442-1330
michele.divine@sbcglobal.net

ERASE
(860) 568-4442
daria-erase@snet.net

HVC
(203) 743-7741
housatonic_valley@snet.net

LFRAC
(203) 356-1980 x108
rac@turningpointsct.org

MAWSAC
(203) 294-3591
mawsac@aol.com

MFSAC
(203) 849-1111
luke.gilliran@snet.net

MCSAAC
(860) 347-5959
kate@mcsaac.org

NECASA
(860) 779-9253
necasa@snet.net

RYASAP
(203) 579-2727
rfrancis_99@yahoo.com

SAAC
(860) 589-4520
saac@ctprevention.org

SCCRAC
(203) 776-1981
sccrac@yahoo.com

VSAAC
(203) 736-8566
pmautte@bghealth.org

My name is Kate Antonucci, and I am here representing the Connecticut Prevention Network, to support House Bill 5211, An Act Concerning Underage Drinking. The Connecticut Prevention Network is the statewide association of the fourteen Regional Actions Councils, whose mission is to prevent and reduce alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse in our communities.

Underage drinking is a major problem across Connecticut; we know both from research and from experience in the field that alcohol is the number one drug of choice among young people. Our national statistics bear this out—Connecticut youth take their first drink, on average, at age 11, a full two years earlier than their counterparts across the nation. Additionally, Connecticut teens drink at rates 28% higher than their peers nationwide. These are not college students, home for a weekend and almost 21. These are high school students—they could be your children's friends, your babysitter, or the teens who live next door.

We know the majority of underage drinking takes place in homes, where alcohol is easily accessible or provided. 61% of Connecticut youth report they drink at house parties, and 77% of high school students report they get their alcohol at home, with or without their parents' permission. In fact, adolescent drinking and house parties are considered a rite of passage in some communities—something that all adults went through as teenagers and “survived just fine”.

We know that even when well-meaning adults “take the keys” at a house party, there are still numerous risks associated with underage drinking, including alcohol poisoning, sexual assault, violence, and suicide.

Many Connecticut teens are drinking not just socially at house parties but “binge drinking” (5 drinks in a sitting), risking alcohol poisoning and even death.

Unfortunately, the existing loophole in Connecticut state law states that while teens may not drink on public property, it says nothing about private property. Therefore, when these house parties occur, local law enforcement have no actual charge to issue to young people—there are no consequences for consuming alcohol underage. Our laws do not support the no-use message prevention professionals advocate. House Bill 5211 would close the loophole in state law and make it illegal for minors to drink on private property.

Some of our communities—approximately 50—have passed a local ordinance to address the state loophole, and issue an infraction or misdemeanor for young people caught drinking underage.

However, given the small land area of our state, youth are savvy enough to simply drive to a community that does not have a local ordinance, creating a patchwork of guidelines and enforcement that don't quite give a consistent message. A state law would allow for the same enforcement and consequences statewide.

We know the risks of underage drinking—the health risks, the safety risks, and the possible increased risk for addiction. Shouldn't our state policy back this up? We are giving young people a mixed message—that underage drinking isn't okay, but our laws say that technically, on private property, it is.

House Bill 5211 would allow an exemption for parents to allow their own child to consume alcohol in their own house—it does not take away parents' rights. It would not give law enforcement officials additional powers to enter private property. What it will do is help reduce underage drinking and protect out young people—and give them the clear, consistent message that underage drinking is unhealthy, against the law, and unacceptable. Thank you.