



# State of Connecticut

## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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### **Testimony of Representative David A. Scribner Before the Judiciary Committee February 24, 2006**

Good afternoon, Sen. McDonald, Rep. Lawlor, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Rep. David A. Scribner (Brookfield) and I am submitting testimony in favor of **H.B. 5211, An Act Concerning Underage Drinking.**

In my position as a state representative, the Honorable M. Jodi Rell has commissioned me to lead Connecticut in a nationwide effort to prevent underage alcohol use. In this role, I recently led a state team of government officials to a "National Meeting of the States" co-sponsored by the federal Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee on Preventing Underage Drinking (ICCPUD), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The state team received current information on the scope and consequences of underage alcohol use as well as evidence-based strategies for addressing the issue. The meeting reinforced what we have already known in Connecticut- that underage drinking is a tremendous public health issue facing youth and young adults on campuses both in our state and nationwide.

Just this past Saturday, February 18, 2006, New Milford Police charged 15 teenagers with "possession of alcohol by a minor" after they received a complaint about underage drinking at a birthday party. A 19-year-old was issued a summons to appear in Superior Court in Bantam later this month, a dozen other 16- and 17-year-olds were summoned to court, and a 15-year-old was referred to juvenile authorities. The party was being hosted by the parents of an 18-year-old high school student; however, the mother stated that she had no idea drinking was going on.

August 2005, the American Medical Association (AMA), in association with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, released the results of two nationwide polls that reported how underage youth obtain alcohol, as well as how easily and often. The polls also showed parental opinions and behaviors about providing alcohol to teenagers and perceptions on how youth acquire alcohol. Some of the findings are as follows:

- Two out of three teens, aged 13-18, said it is easy to get alcohol from their homes without parents knowing about it,
- One third responded that it is easy to obtain alcohol from their own parents knowingly, which increases to 40 percent when it is from a friend's parent, and
- One in four teens have attended a party where minors were drinking in front of parents.

Parents who allow underage youth to drink under their supervision are under a dangerous misperception that they are safer than without this supervision. According to SAMHSA, of young adults, ages 18-20, who drank heavily (5 or more drinks on 5 or more occasions in the past month) 66 % drove under the influence of alcohol in the past year, and 42 % often drove or rode without wearing a seat belt. Injuries and car accidents, as well as interpersonal assaults and destruction of property after parent-hosted parties are sad reminders that no parent can completely control the actions of intoxicated youth, during or after a party. And the main message youth hear when parents allow them to drink is that drinking illegally is all right, when it's not only not all right, but it is extremely unsafe.

Other key findings of the two AMA polls included:

- Nearly one in four teens, aged 13-18, and one in three girls, aged 16-18, said their own parents have supplied them with alcohol, and teens who have obtained alcohol reported that, in the past six months, parents were the suppliers three times on average.
- While 71 % of parents with youth, aged 12-20, disagreed with the statement that teen drinking was okay if a parent were present, 76 % think it is likely that teenagers get alcohol from someone's parent - and they knew about it.
- One out of four parents of youth, aged 12-20 (25 %), said they have allowed their teens to drink with their supervision in the past six months. Approximately one in 12 (8 %) indicated they allowed their teen's friends to also drink under their supervision in the past six months.
- While only eight percent (8 %) of parents of youth aged 12-20 indicated that they allowed their child and his/her friends to drink with supervision in the past six months, 21 % of youth attended a party where the alcohol was provided by someone else's parents. And 27 % of youth attended a party where they were drinking with parents present. This discrepancy suggests parents are unaware that other parents are allowing their own children to drink.

SAMHSA reports that parents' drinking behavior and favorable attitudes toward drinking have been associated with adolescents' initiation and continuation of drinking. Early initiation of drinking has been identified as an important risk factor for later alcohol-related problems. Lack of parental support, monitoring, and communication also has been significantly related to frequency of drinking, heavy drinking, and drunkenness among youth. Peer drinking and acceptance also strongly influences adolescent drinking behaviors.

In Connecticut, the most stringent laws for the supply of alcohol to minors apply to the consumption of alcohol by young people in licensed premises or public places but, there are currently no laws to prohibit adults serving alcohol to people under 21 years of age in private dwellings. It is imperative that this be addressed given that the majority of young people report acquiring alcohol from their own parents or from their friends' parents.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of this legislation.