

# Underage Drinking: Not A Minor Problem

In this season of proms, graduations and barbecues, it is important to revisit the issue of underage drinking because we all want to keep our kids safe.

Unfortunately, the statistics are terrifying. According to the surgeon general, each year approximately 5,000 people die as a result of underage drinking, 1,900 die in car accidents, 1,600 in homicides, 300 in suicides and hundreds in other deaths due to accidents like falls, burns and drownings. It is well known that alcohol also fuels incidents of assaults, criminal mischief and sexual assaults.

Studies cited by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism indicate that kids do not benefit from being allowed to drink in the home as a method of demystifying alcohol and helping young people deal with drinking in social situations or college. The research showed that students whose parents allowed them to drink at home or to "get experience" with alcohol were more likely to drink more heavily outside the home and their drinking tended to escalate at a greater rate. The studies also found that young people were less likely to drink heavily if there were specific rules against underage drinking in the home.

My office played an integral role in developing Nassau County's Social Host Law because of these facts. The law prevents individuals over 18 years old from allowing minors to drink alcohol in any residence that they own or rent. A violation of this law could result in a misdemeanor conviction and repeat offenders could face up to a year in jail. The law was intended to give parents the security of knowing their children are not being served alcohol in another home.

To help homeowners and landlords comply with the law, here are some answers to frequently asked questions:

**Q: What am I required to do if I discover underage drinking on my property?**

**A:** A homeowner or landlord is required under the law to take corrective action, which includes a prompt demand of the underage drinker to forfeit and discontinue drinking an alcoholic beverage or leave the premises.

**Q: What if the demand is rejected?**

**A:** Then the host must promptly report the underage consumption to local law enforcement or any person with a greater degree of

authority over the minor (such as a parent or guardian).

**Q: What if I'm not home at the time of the drinking?**

**A:** If you are not home and did not know alcohol would be served to minors, you are not liable. If you knew or had a history of providing alcohol and leaving, you could be charged.

**Q: What if my 18-year-old has a party I don't know about?**

**A:** You cannot be charged, but your child can.

**Q: Is there a religious exception to the law?**

**A:** Yes. The use and consumption of alcohol by a minor for religious purposes is exempt from the Social Host Law.

To report the illegal purchase or consumption of alcohol by minors, call the New York State Police's anonymous tip line at 866-UNDER21.

By working together, we can keep young people safe this summer season.



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