

SOCIAL HOST ACCOUNTABILITY AND UNDERAGE DRINKING

Adopted by Convention Delegates May 2009

- WHEREAS, The minimum legal drinking age is 21 years as established by the Federal Uniform Drinking Age Act of 1984, and yet alcohol is the most abused substance for minors ages 12 to 20; and
- WHEREAS, Underage drinking is directly involved in the deaths of approximately 5,000 youth under the age of 21 every year nationwide, is linked to two-thirds of all sexual assaults including date rape, contributes to a 10 times higher incidence of physical assault and a 12 times higher incidence of unintentional injury; and
- WHEREAS, The 2007 *Surgeon General's Call to Action* reports alcohol use may alter adolescents' development and put them at higher risk for long-lasting, detrimental effects on the developing brain; and
- WHEREAS, Research identifies adults or "social hosts" as the primary source and private homes the primary site of alcohol availability, drinking games, and binge drinking for our youth; and
- WHEREAS, In California there is no state law addressing social hosting, and there is only a small number of cities and counties in which social host laws have been enacted; and
- WHEREAS, Where they exist, social host laws may act as a deterrent through the assessment of fines, community service, and/or jail time for those who practice social hosting and provide law enforcement with the ability to intervene at parties where underage drinking occurs most: in homes and on private property; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA, its units, councils, and districts provide factual information to students, parents, and community members regarding the detrimental effects and significant dangers of underage drinking and social hosting, defined as adults who furnish alcohol to minors under the age of 21 who are not their own, and/or knowingly allow underage drinking parties in private settings; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA, its units, councils, and districts encourage and support legislation to adopt social host laws that would prohibit adults from providing alcohol or allowing the consumption of alcohol in homes and on noncommercial property by youth under the age of 21 who are not their children; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA, its units, councils, and districts support law enforcement in upholding the minimum legal drinking age of 21, including but not limited to social host laws and ordinances; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA forward this resolution to the National PTA for consideration by the delegates at the National PTA Convention.

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BACKGROUND SUMMARY

The minimum legal drinking age in all 50 states is 21, yet alcohol is involved in the deaths of more teens than all other illicit drugs combined, by a 4-to-1 ratio. Youth who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to become dependent on alcohol than those who wait until age 21. Research has shown that, on average, youth and adolescents first use alcohol at 13.1 years of age. The 2007 *Surgeon General's Call to Action* states that alcohol is the most widely used substance of abuse among America's youth, ages 12 to 20.

Social hosting, a disturbing practice in society today, is defined as adults in private settings providing alcohol and/or allowing underage drinking among children who are not their own. While some believe that consumption of alcohol before the age of 21 is an inevitable "rite of passage," research demonstrates this behavior is detrimental to our youth. The consequences of underage drinking include a wide range of medical problems. Research has shown that the brain changes dramatically during adolescence, and consumption of alcohol during this stage of life can seriously inhibit its normal growth and development. In addition, underage drinking contributes significantly to participation in risky sexual behaviors and the incidence of physical and sexual assaults, suicide attempts, drowning, alcohol poisoning, and traffic accidents.

An encouraging note in the *Surgeon General's Call to Action* is that underage alcohol use is not inevitable, and we are not powerless to stop it. The Surgeon General points out that an adolescent's decision to use alcohol is influenced by many factors, including normal maturational changes as well as various social and cultural environments that surround adolescents: their families, schools, peers, and communities. Therefore, it is the collective responsibility of all these groups to assist in the prevention and reduction of underage drinking.

Found on the MADD website, *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility* documents the wide-ranging and devastating consequences of youth consumption of alcohol, and urges states and localities to enact a comprehensive set of strategies to reduce underage alcohol consumption, including strengthening social host liability laws affecting persons under the age of 21. Legislators across the country are responding to the harms associated with underage drinking by enacting a range of new laws targeting property owners on whose premises underage drinking occurs. As of January 2007, 24 states have enacted social host statutes.

The state of California has no social host law; however, 40 of its cities and counties have passed social host ordinances, including the social host liability ordinances passed in every Ventura County jurisdiction. The first national study of civil social host law found that social host liability laws reduce binge drinking, and drinking and driving. These ordinances do not prohibit family activities within the home involving the use of alcohol by immediate family members or religious practices that include the use of alcohol.

According to the Surgeon General, addressing the public health problem of underage alcohol use begins with an examination of our own attitudes toward underage drinking and our recognition of the seriousness of its consequences for adolescents and their families, as well as for society as a whole. Underage alcohol use is not a benign, acceptable rite of passage, but is a serious health and safety threat to adolescent development that cannot be ignored.

Education, communication, and legislation are essential in comprehensively addressing the problem of underage drinking and the practice of social hosting. By providing up-to-date and research-based information, facilitating open and honest communication, and supporting strong social host legislation, we will convey the fact that underage drinking is unacceptable and fulfill our commitment to advocate for all children. We owe them nothing less.