

Kudos to law enforcement for focus on party ordinance

By Karen Fleck 4:30 p.m. June 7, 2013

If you read the news, you know local law enforcement is aggressively enforcing Social Host Ordinances — or “house party” laws — in San Diego County.

While it’s illegal for anyone under 21 to purchase or possess alcohol, young people throughout the region say it’s easy to get alcohol and they can find plenty of places to drink — including the homes of their friends and family.

I’m troubled at how much alcohol is provided by some parents. And if it takes a law — like social host — to keep others from providing a place where kids drink, I’m all for it.

During the first six months of 2012, sheriff’s deputies cited 30 adults for Social Host Ordinance violations — averaging five tickets per month, more than double the average monthly arrests made in each of the previous three years.

A recent check of court records by the Alcohol Policy Panel of San Diego County found that charges were filed in nearly three-quarters of those cases, with an overwhelming majority of suspects pleading guilty, being fined and placed on probation.

Kudos to police and prosecutors.

Research studies have repeatedly identified house parties as the primary source from which minors obtain alcohol. Having raised two sons myself, I know this is true. It’s the reason, the party was always held at our house — where I knew there would be no alcohol served.

To those who believe they are providing a safe place for the kids to drink — don’t kid yourself. There is no safe place. Underage drinking is a high-risk behavior that can lead to deaths, assaults, stabbings and rapes.

Don’t take my word for it. Look at the statistics:

- In 2010, more than 1,900 youth, ages 12 to 20, were admitted to local emergency rooms with a diagnosis of alcohol abuse, according to the San Diego County’s Emergency Discharge Database.
- That same year, the California Highway Patrol reported 324 drinking-and-driving collisions in San Diego County involving drivers under the age of 21.
- On average, 28 minors (ages 20 and younger) die each year in San Diego County with alcohol in their system, according to San Diego County Medical Examiner’s Office.

Drinking is not a rite of passage, nor should it be condoned as such.

It’s time for parents to stand up to their kids on this issue. It’s time for older siblings to be adults about this. And it’s time for friends to respect both their friends and the law.

That’s been the position of the California State PTA for some time. The association is on record in support of Social Hosts laws, which are proven to reduce drunk-driving fatalities and binge drinking.

I’m not naïve enough to believe that laws themselves will put an end to underage drinking. In a society where alcohol is widely available and aggressively promoted, it will take the collective will of the community to reframe the issue of underage drinking.

Supporting the enforcement and prosecution of social host laws is one way to demonstrate that will.

Fleck is a member of the Alcohol Policy Panel of San Diego County and president of the Ninth District PTA.

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