

## Overview of Social Host Ordinances

Studies indicate that social host laws are among the most effective and recommended ways to reduce underage drinking. Social Host Liability laws hold individuals who knowingly provide or allow the use of alcohol by minors or intoxicated adults liable for resulting property damage, injury, death, or violation fines. However, there are gaps in Social Host Liability laws. Social Host Ordinances close that gap by providing a civil remedy. They can establish fines to recoup costs incurred in dealing with the consequences of underage drinking, such as emergency services and law enforcement. These ordinances hold the host accountable without the burden of a tragedy occurring, such as an injury or death. The host may or may not be the parent; it could be the youth themselves, a sibling/cousin, friend, or friend's parent.

## The Goal of Social Host Ordinances

The overarching goal of implementing Social Host Ordinances is to reduce youth social access to alcohol. We know from data that most underage drinkers do not pay for the alcohol they drink. There are two types of access – Retail and Social. Social access is when youth obtain the product at parties, from their parents (with or without their permission), or a friend/sibling and is, by far, the most common form of access. According to the 2018 Illinois Youth Survey, 74% of Illinois 12<sup>th</sup> graders accessed alcohol through a social source, with 55% getting it at a party.<sup>1</sup>

## Why a Social Host Ordinance is Important to Communities

Social Host Ordinances send a powerful message that hosting underage drinking parties is not acceptable in the community. They empower concerned citizens to report suspected underage drinking parties while providing law enforcement with a tool to address those parties.

Studies have shown that when parents provide alcohol or allow an underage drinking party, they are doing more harm than good. Not only does it increase negative risks, but it also creates a perception of direct approval for drinking. According to research, this perception is then carried over to times when the parent is not around. “Adolescents who attend parties where parents supply alcohol are at increased risk for heavy episodic drinking, alcohol-related problems, and drinking and driving.”<sup>2</sup> This same research shows when parents increase their restrictiveness towards alcohol use, adolescent alcohol use decreases or is less likely to occur.

## Considerations for Planning & Implementing Social Host Ordinances

Ordinances should be developed based on your specific community needs. Gather data and anecdotal information from stakeholders such as law enforcement, hospitals, emergency medical providers, and other community organizations to determine issues related to youth alcohol use, and adults providing to minors. Using data, such as the Illinois Youth Survey, allows you to identify your local issue and what contributes to that issue. Sharing your data will show the need for a Social Host Ordinance.

When planning for a Social Host Ordinance, the strength of your ordinance is key. To build a strong Social Host Ordinance, the following categories should be included:

- Substances Included
- Legal Definitions
- Controlled Area – Residence, Premises, Public Place, Hotel/Motel, Conveyance

- Presence of Host
- Tiered Penalties
- Response Costs

You do not have to reinvent the wheel. Many communities have passed strong, successful Social Host Ordinances. Review those ordinances when working with your legal counsel to draft your community's ordinance.

## Helpful Tips & Suggestions

Building relationships with stakeholders and enlisting their involvement is critical for gaining support for and assisting in the development of a local Social Host Ordinance. Planning should include the sectors needed to enforce the ordinance. Include law enforcement, courts (judges and prosecutors), and elected officials when presenting the need and benefits of a Social Host Ordinance.

Utilize the youth members of your coalition to educate on the need and benefits of a Social Host Ordinance. Ensure members are trained on how to educate, not lobby, as well as how to testify at city council meetings.

Ordinances only work if people know of their existence and have a realistic expectation that their failure to obey the ordinance will be met with consequences. Publicizing your new Social Host Ordinance and informing the community about both state and local consequences for violating the law are essential parts of the process.

## Resources & Tools

- Alcohol Policy Resource Center – [Directory of Municipal Ordinances – Social Host Ordinances](#)
- Alcohol Policy Resource Center - Helping Teens Find Their Voice To Reduce Underage Drinking and Alcohol Misuse in Communities: Educating Elected Officials <https://www.prevention.org/Resources/770f2057-c144-4232-8fff-9c653f8f636b/YouthVoice.pdf>
- Alcohol Policy Resource Center - Helping Teens Find Their Voice To Reduce Underage Drinking and Alcohol Misuse in Communities: Educating on Policy <https://www.prevention.org/Resources/1bbbc2e7-a891-4a5f-a440-0bcffd699c7f/APRCYouthVoice-EducateLobby.pdf>
- Alcohol Policy Resource Center - Policy Implementation and Enforcement Plan
- Alcohol Policy Resource Center - Policy Adoption Advocacy Plan
- Ventura County Behavioral Health Department; Training, Applied Research, and Alcohol and Drug Prevention Division: [Model Social Host Liability Ordinance](#) with Legal Commentary and Resources, September 2005

## References

<sup>1</sup> Center for Prevention Research and Development. (2020) Illinois Youth Survey 2018 Frequency Report: State of Illinois. Champaign, IL: CPRD, School of Social Work, University of Illinois.

<sup>2</sup> Providing Alcohol for Underage Youth: What Messages Should We Be Sending Parents? Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs/July 2014 Ovgu Kaynak, Ph.D., Ken C. Winters, Ph. D., John Cacciola, Ph. D., Kimberly C. Kirby, Ph. D., and Amelia M. Arria, Ph. D.

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