

## Underage drinking law targets parents

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HARTFORD — Today's start of the summer season is a good occasion to remember the eight-month-old state law that makes it illegal for property owners to let minors drink alcohol, legislative leaders said Friday.

And with a recent high-profile bust in Newtown of a school board member, who allegedly let a party at his home spin out of control, the lawmakers are concerned that too many parents in Connecticut are unaware of the new law and its consequences.

"We are of course on the eve of Memorial Day weekend, a time for reflection, a time to remember those who sacrificed their lives for this great country and a time where people get together," said Sen. Jonathan A. Harris, D-West Hartford, co-chairman of the Human Services Committee.

"We're also entering prom season and graduation season and during that time it's important that we send the message that we're sending today," he said during a morning news conference. "This is so important because it's about keeping kids safe." When it took effect on Oct. 1, the new law also made it illegal if property owners fail to take "reasonable steps" to keep alcohol from underage people. First offenses are infractions costing \$146.

"If you see, if you know there's underage drinking on your property, you need to take reasonable steps to stop it," Harris said, noting the law was passed following incidents in some towns where there were no local ordinances prohibiting underage drinking on private property, tying the hands of local police.

"We don't want the Memorial Day weekend to turn into a Memorial Day service for a young person or an innocent victim," said Sen. John A. Kissel, R-Enfield, ranking member of the Judiciary Committee.

"A lot of parents had indicated 'well if we have a controlled party on our property, we can keep a better eye on these young people because we know they're going to drink anyhow,'" Kissel said, recalling previous debates on the issue.

"But the evidence proved otherwise and quite often parents, with the best of intentions, were supervising maybe for a half-hour, an hour, but as with lots of parties, people would come that hadn't been invited, and the parents ended up going to the bedroom or other parts of the house," Kissel said. "And all of a sudden something that may have been well-intentioned became unsupervised and the young people drank to excess, putting themselves in danger and other innocent people throughout the community in danger as well," he said.

For Stephen Guest, whose 20-year-old daughter Kristine died after an underage drinking party two years ago, it's an issue of life and death at a time when high school graduates and other young adults under the age of 21, should be looking ahead to their futures.

"Parents who supposedly control parties involving alcohol are violating the right of parents who do not want their children at such affairs," Guest warned. Guest, a Quinnipiac University student from West Hartford, was visiting a college campus in New York's Adirondack Mountains at the time of the February 2005 snowmobile collision that claimed her life. Alcohol and speed were the cause of the one-vehicle crash of the snowmobile on which she was a passenger.

On May 5, a 50-year-old Newtown school board member and his wife were issued infractions for condoning a party on his property and eight teens were charged with alcohol possession.

Recently 15 markets and package stores in Ansonia were cited for selling alcohol to an underage youth.

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