

New Conn. Drinking Law a Buzzkill

Editorial

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Monday, more than 100 new state laws took effect in Connecticut. Amongst the most discussed of these recent pieces of legislation is the state's new law against serving alcohol to minors on one's own private property. According to the Stamford Advocate, "Anyone who knowingly allows a minor to consume alcohol on his or her property - or does not make 'reasonable efforts' to stop them from drinking - will be in violation of the law." Of course, as this law is only designed to stop parties in which adults knowingly allow underage drinking on their property, there are some notable exceptions - specifically, parents are still allowed to provide alcohol to their own underage children, spouses are still allowed to provide to their underage spouses and minors may consume alcohol in religious rites or services.



Although this law may be well-intentioned and certainly a decisive move in the fight against irresponsible underage drinking, it is huge leap in the wrong direction. Yes, underage alcohol consumption is illegal and can have many negative social consequences - including, but certainly not limited to, youthful drunken driving and teenage alcoholism. However, minors have and will always drink underage. By criminalizing house parties thrown by consenting parents and by subjecting repeat offenders to up to a year in prison or fines of up to \$500, Connecticut lawmakers have foolishly removed the single safest form of underage drinking.

A party thrown with the consent of one's parents can be significantly safer than one thrown without parental supervision in that it can be closely regulated. Responsible parents can limit the number of guests at this type of party, monitor the amount of alcohol consumed by these guests, halt illicit drug use and control the sorts of activities the guests may participate in - including driving home. They can also teach their children, and perhaps their children's friends, about responsible drinking habits and the virtues of moderation. Clearly, this benign scenario is preferable to a party in which underage minors are drinking to dangerous levels of excess, behaving recklessly and going unchecked by adults.

The state of Connecticut is foolish to prosecute parents who want to provide a healthy environment for underage drinkers. If these parents are willing to undertake the liability already associated with allowing underage drinking to occur on their private property - including problems of property damage, drunken minors leaving by car and the potential for alcohol poisoning - the law should not further punish them with jail time or fines. Ultimately, taking a hard line stance like this one prevents willing parents from providing a safe social environment for their children - encouraging teens to be more secretive about their drinking and engage in more dangerous drinking practices. The state has made an error in passing this new drinking law and time will tell if some minors end up paying the gravest price for this error.