

From The Beat to the Bench  
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## Underage

We are rapidly approaching the end of the school year which means that high school seniors will be enjoying their final prom and eagerly anticipating their impending graduation.

Unfortunately, it also signals the annual spike in arrests for underage drinking and associated alcohol offenses.

Under Ohio Law no one under the age of 21 years shall purchase or consume alcohol. A violation of this law carries a maximum fine of \$1,000.00 and a maximum jail sentence of 180 days.

The Ohio Legislature has also enacted what is known as a “keg law”. This is also a first degree misdemeanor carrying a possible 6 months jail and \$1,000.00 fine for parents who permit underage drinking in their home.

Specifically, if an after-prom or graduation party is held at a private home and the parents knowingly allow underage teens to drink alcoholic beverages both the teens and parents may be charged with separate crimes. A parent can not authorize other parents to serve their children alcohol.

State law also prohibits the use of false identification in order to purchase alcohol.

Finally, parents should remember that Ohio law provides that parents may be held liable for any injury or damages caused by a teenager who has been permitted to drink alcohol in their home. In other words, if a teenager consumes alcohol and then leaves the home and causes an accident the parents may be held liable in a civil lawsuit as well as having criminal charges brought against them.

Ohio law also prohibits the operation of a motor vehicle by anyone under the age of 21 with a blood alcohol concentration of only .02. A conviction can result in up to 30 days in jail, a fine and license suspension.

In the United States in 2008 over 3500 teens were killed and more than 350,000 received medical treatment for injuries suffered in motor vehicle accidents. Statistics indicate that over 25% of the drivers who died in these accidents had a blood alcohol content of .08 or higher.

Recently a highly recruited high school football player fell to his death from a third floor motel balcony while on spring break in Florida. Police reports indicate he was highly intoxicated.

We must all work together especially at this time of year to stop the senseless tragedies associated with the irresponsible and illegal underage alcohol consumption.