



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program
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NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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The OJJDP Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Initiative supports cooperation between community organizations, enforcement agencies, youth, and other concerned citizens to change local ordinances and enforcement practices.

Concerned Parent Gets Keg Registration for Rhode Island

Rhode Island's Legislature has passed keg registration, adding the State to a growing number who have adopted the policy. The bill was signed into law and took effect June 2002. The Legislature's previous attempts to pass keg registration had been unsuccessful.

As is too often true, it took tragedy to resurrect interest in a stronger law. In spring of 2001, a teen in the town of Barrington was killed in a car crash on his way home from a keg party. The driver, also intoxicated, lost control while racing another car. The driver was unharmed, but the passenger's death shook the community—especially coming just prior to graduation.

Among those upset by the death was Gail Gilkey, a local parent. She and many others in the community were frustrated by their neighbors' unwillingness to connect the child's death to alcohol. These concerned parents placed an ad—with 600 signatures—in the local paper, demanding increased controls on alcohol. The Barrington Town Council noticed the ad, and began exploring options to reduce youth access to alcohol. Zeroing in on the problem of keg parties, one council member introduced an ordinance that would fine adults who provided kegs to minors. Unfortunately, the ordinance did not pass.

Disappointed that local efforts had proven fruitless, Gilkey decided to take these concerns to her State

legislators. After a little research, she learned that the Rhode Island House had already passed a keg registration bill, but not the Senate. She then contacted her State Senator, David Bates, who said he would support a similar bill. With some coaxing, he agreed to introduce the bill himself. The bill was announced with a press conference held in front of a 15-foot tower of kegs confiscated by local police.

In March of 2002, Gilkey learned that the bill had not moved through the necessary committee. She again called Senator Bates to stress her support for the bill. Meanwhile, key leaders across the State were working in support of the bill, including the Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws Advisory Committee, Substance Abuse Task Forces, and the Police Chiefs Association. Senator Bates found renewed enthusiasm for the bill and arranged a hearing, which was "very successful" according to Gilkey. Advocates—including youth, parents, academic officials, community leaders, and police—testified in favor of the law. After the hearing, the bill passed both the Senate and House, and ultimately landed on the Governor's desk, where it became law.

➤Our Point:
Communities, states, and law enforcement are successfully changing laws, regulations, and enforcement practices to reduce underage drinking.

Without the perseverance of Gail Gilkey and many others, the bill might have languished indefinitely. She says that well-meaning legislators are often overwhelmed by the number of bills they must consider: "You need some special force to bring your particular bill to people's attention."

For more information, contact Brenda Amodei, Rhode Island EUDL Coordinator, at 401-462-6085 or bamodei@mhrh.state.ri.us