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**Middletown & Newport
Working Together Against Underage Drinking**

Middletown Takes Important Steps to Curb Underage Drinking

Middletown recently took another important step forward in its fight against underage drinking when it became the third community in Rhode Island to adopt a “local” social host ordinance. The ordinance closes a loophole in the state law that only targets those over the age of 21 for prosecution for providing alcohol to minors. Under the Middletown ordinance, anyone who knowingly allows someone younger than 21 to drink alcohol on their property can be fined in municipal court. Fines for violations of all sections of this ordinance have been increased to more closely reflect the state penalties.

Sanctions are provided for “consumption” of alcohol by minors as well, making it unlawful for a minor not only to possess alcohol, but to “consume” alcohol in Middletown. The recently passed ordinance can also mandate participation in an alcohol education/awareness program as part of a first offense. Middletown is the first community in the state to require this alcohol education component. For second time offenders, a mandatory substance abuse assessment by a licensed substance abuse professional can be ordered.

This ordinance now limits social access of alcohol (that supplied by older siblings, friends, parents or other adults) to minors and will work alongside a previous ordinance passed last year requiring liquor store employees to have Responsible Beverage Seller/Server certification similar to restaurant and bar servers, which limits retail access to underage youth.

As noted in the Newport Daily News, “Our View” column, published on March 4, 2010, “We applaud (Middletown) officials for recognizing the problem and taking bold steps to address it, including holding responsible the people who allow it to happen.”