

STATE OF NEW MEXICO  
**County of Luna**

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### **Media Release**

In an effort to fight high levels of dangerous underage drinking in the community, the Luna County Board of Commissioners is considering adopting a social host ordinance that could create parameters to hold families accountable for allowing youth alcohol consumption on their property.

Social host ordinances have been adopted by local governments across the nation and within New Mexico to give law enforcement an effective tool to fight underage drinking. Under existing laws, it is difficult for law enforcement to punish lawbreakers who provide alcohol to minors. A social host ordinance could allow law enforcement to use a civil process to fine homeowners or property owners who allow underage drinking on their property. A community forum to discuss the potential ordinance will be held at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 7 in the third floor chambers of the Luna County Courthouse, 700 S. Silver Ave.

“I would not want someone else making the decision that it is okay for my child to drink alcohol just because they are at another house,” Jessica Jara, Partnerships for Success II coordinator, said. PFSII is a substance abuse prevention program focused on reducing underage drinking and prescription drug abuse among youth. “Social host ordinances are an evidence-based strategy proven to lower underage drinking in other communities.”

According to the most recent Youth Risk and Resiliency survey, which is administered every two years by the New Mexico Department of Health, high school students in 2013 had alcohol consumption rates nearly twice that of the state’s average. Over 40 percent of the students surveyed admitted to drinking alcohol in the past 30 days (state average was 28 percent) and over 30 percent admitted to binge drinking (state average was about 17 percent). Binge drinking means having four or five drinks in a single session. Even more alarming, the rate of extreme binge drinking — having 10 or more drinks in a session — was over eight percent, more than double the state average of four percent.

“It seems obvious that we need to give law enforcement a more effective tool to address these dangerous behaviors in our community,” Charles “Tink” Jackson, Luna County manager, said. “We’ve already had far too many deaths associated with underage drinking in our community, not to mention the excessive rates of teenage pregnancy and violence that can come along with underage alcohol consumption.”

An ordinance, if passed by commissioners, could allow police to issue a civil citation to a homeowner for allowing underage minors to drink on their property. It could also create a

mechanism to cite property owners who ignore previous warnings about tenants allowing underage drinking on their properties. In other words, a property owner could be issued a warning that their tenants are allowing underage drinking on their property before a fine is levied. Commissioners can also adopt language that could allow for a warning for homeowners as well before being issued a fine.

“People sometimes like to think that just because they drank as teens, that it’s acceptable for their children to drink alcohol. That is simply misleading, because we see the negative impacts of underage drinking throughout our community and health care systems. Underage drinking increases the likelihood of alcoholism and alcohol-related problematic behaviors later in life,” Edith Vazquez, Luna County DWI Prevention coordinator, said. “Drinking increases the chances that children will engage in risky behavior or do something that they will regret when they are sober.”

Because youth will oftentimes have parties in households where the parents are gone, communities will sometimes include language in the ordinance that could allow for a warning before a fine is issued. Other communities have adopted ordinances that allow for law enforcement to bill households for repeated nuisance calls, such as for loud music.

“As a law enforcement officer, I know it can be extremely difficult to prove where the alcohol a minor consumed came from,” Sheriff John Mooradian said. “We have a serious problem with underage drinking in our community, and a social host ordinance is an effective tool to lower occurrences of the problem.”

Commissioners are hosting the forum to hear feedback from the community on the proposal, and to accept recommendations for ordinance language. A vote to consider the ordinance has not been scheduled.

Espanola, Santa Fe and Moriarty are communities in New Mexico with social host laws on the books.

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