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Today's Edition

Long Island

When alcohol may be criminal

Long Beach moves toward a 'social host' law that would punish adults who offer drinks to minors at home

BY WILLIAM MURPHY

Newsday Staff Writer

August 1, 2006

Long Beach lawmakers have introduced a bill that would make the city the first locality in the state to hold adults criminally responsible for alcohol consumed by minors in their homes.

An Aug. 15 hearing for legislation creating a "social host" law is expected to be approved tonight at a meeting of the City Council.

"I think this is just great," said Judi Vining, a supporter of the bill and one of

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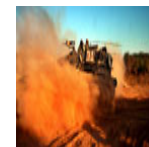


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the leaders of the Long Beach Coalition to Prevent Underage Drinking.

City Council President Leonard Remo, a Democrat, said the measure was "a more clear, neater ordinance," than model legislation that was the subject of a prior public hearing on June 20. "It establishes the same thing in a cleaner manner," he said.

He said the bill was one of several steps the city had taken in recent years to address the issue of underage drinking.

That included a mandatory pre-prom meeting with parents this spring that addressed drinking, and a change in police and court policy three years ago that created tougher enforcement against underage drinking in public and education programs for offenders.

Councilman Robert Tepper had expressed some reservations about a local law during the June hearing, but said yesterday he had personally worked on the language of the new bill.

"I still think this should be more a county function, but we have a problem and, to the extent this bill addresses it, so be it," Tepper said.

Long Beach would join a growing number of governmental bodies, as well as some counties and local governments, that have passed "social host" laws in recent years, making it a crime to serve alcohol to a minor in private homes.

The Long Beach law would not apply where alcohol was served as part of a religious ceremony or to the children of the homeowner. Penalties are a fine of up to \$250 and 15 days in jail.

Councilman James Hennessy, a Republican, said he wanted to hear what residents had to say about the proposal before making up his mind.

"This is a big first for Long Beach, but the point is not to be first, but to get it right," Hennessy said.

Vining said Long Beach has all the elements it needs to attack underage



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drinking across the board. She said it is the only locality on the Island to have its own police force, court, medical center and school system.

"If we put all these things together, we can make a difference," she said.

Proposal at a glance

WHAT: "No person having control of any residence shall allow an open house party to take place at said residence if such person knows or has reason to know that any alcoholic beverage or drug is being unlawfully possessed, served to or consumed by a minor at said residence."

WHO: Minors are anyone under age 21.

WHERE: "Any home, apartment, condominium, co-operative unit or other dwelling unit of any kind, including yards and open areas adjacent thereto."

PENALTIES: Fines up to \$250 and up to 15 days in jail, or a combination of fine and jail.

- WILLIAM MURPHY

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