

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

2005 Legislative Agenda for Children and Youth

Background Information

Prevention of Youth Access to Alcohol

Issue #1:

The recent death of an Oklahoma college student from alcohol poisoning reminds us of the horrible consequences of underage drinking. Despite the headlines about illegal drugs such as methamphetamines, alcohol is still Oklahoma's most abused drug. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey reports that over half of Oklahoma's high school students (50,000) have consumed alcohol, and two-thirds of these (33,000) have participated in binge drinking.

Current penalties for minors in possession of alcohol have proven to be ineffective in curbing underage drinking. Penalties typically range from community service to a small fine (\$150). Low-point beer – which is the drug of choice for teenagers – is unregulated. There are no provisions to suspend the licenses of stores that repeatedly sell illegally to minors – and the trend of parents and other adults buying alcohol for teenagers compounds the problem.

Binge drinking is a significant problem on college campuses throughout the US. Each year about 1,400 college students die as a result of alcohol-related injuries and hundreds of thousands more are assaulted or injured, are arrested, engage in unprotected sex, or develop alcohol-related health problems.

A new and deliberate focus on underage drinking is warranted in Oklahoma to ensure that our youngsters' transition into adulthood is safe and healthy.

Recommendation:

The Children's Agenda supports the creation of the Prevention of Youth Access to Alcohol Act, giving the ABLE Commission regulatory and licensing authority over 3.2 alcohol, suspending driving privileges for minors in possession of alcohol, increasing fines and penalties for adults who provide alcohol to youth under 21, and earmarking the fines for prevention-related education media campaigns.