EXHIBIT 1
DATE 1-31-05
HB 424

House Bill Number 424
Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am Lake County Sheriff, William Barron, and I would like to thank you for allowing me the honor and privilege of speaking to you about this extremely important House Bill Number 424.

I am the Sheriff of Lake County, one of the fastest growing counties in the state. Our county's rate of growth has stripped us of the resources needed to even start effectively dealing with our "Minors in Possession of Alcohol" problems. In Lake County 12 to 17 year olds account for approximately 2600 children. In 2004 there were 117 MIP's issued to this age group! Eighteen to twenty year olds account for approximately 902 young adults. There were 158 MIP's issued to this group! This is approximately a 30% increase over 2003's numbers. In approximately a 6 month period 5 children, 2 eleven year olds, 1 fourteen year old and 2 fifteen year olds died as a direct result of Alcohol Toxicity, and these figures don't represent any of the alcohol related fatal vehicle accidents for kids under 21 years of age. As you can see we have a very serious alcohol problem to deal with in our children. Any solution to the problem cannot be just a law enforcement approach. It will require a community working together to make a significant difference.

House Bill Number 424 will be capped at a maximum $725,000 each fiscal year. This is not a large sum of money to address such a huge problem. House Bill Number 424, however, uses a well thought out four-pronged approach of attacking the problem.

As stated in the first prong of the Bill, why can't retail merchants have ID scanners when they are so readily available throughout the State. Most of these merchants are already connected with the State Internet if necessary, but most scanners would only need to be a piece of equipment that indicated the age after being swiped. Something I think would be invaluable in this state is the Alcohol Management course, which is mandatory training for employees of every retail outlet in Colorado. These courses provide extensive training in the ability to make judgment calls in whether or not alcohol should be sold to an individual, refusing service, the reporting of underage people, and the legal ramifications of failing to properly deal with these situations.

The second prong of this approach deals with law enforcement. As the Sheriff of a fast growing county, I think educating and training law enforcement personnel is essential. Often, law enforcement officers take MIP's too lightly. They need training in the laws, the social ramifications of failing to enforce the laws and the long term effects, how to safely and effectively take down keggers, and how to perform compliance checks properly.

Prong three: Addressing accountability needs to be more than a punishment. Again children need to understand they are responsible for their actions and the consequences that follow when bad choices are made. This is where the community will come together

and through training step up and be pro-active participants in our struggle to keep our youth safe. This has to include education for parents that take this problem way too lightly and often sponsor what they feel are safe parties (parties offering alcohol).

The fourth prong in disseminating information will be a strong state-wide effort involving every law enforcement agency, all health and human service agencies, retailers, children's programs like the Coalition for Kids and Boys and Girls Club, parent organizations and schools, in short, our state-wide community.

This House Bill is critical for counties like ours where two eleven year old boys walk out into a snow-covered prairie, lay down and die. A county where a 14-year-old boy drinks himself to an unconscious level and is burned to death in an abandoned trailer. A county where a 15 year old boy goes fishing for the day, consuming so much alcohol, when he returns home he sits in a chair and dies. A county where a 15-year-old girl drinks so much alcohol she passes out in the back of a van and after being sexually assaulted never regains consciousness. All of these events happened within approximately a six month time period. What the statistics don't show is the number of youth brought in weekly to our local emergency rooms with BAC's of .3 and higher. We never hear about these cases because these children didn't die. And this is just one county.

It's an old cliché "kids are our future" but no matter often this is stated, it is a fact. And in this great state of Montana our children, our future, are dying in homes, snow covered fields and on highways because of the underage drinking problems.

In closing, I hope and pray I have helped you understand the importance of this bill and the positive effects it will have on our future.