EXHIBIT 5
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HB 20

Teens Against Drugs and Alcohol

Students from Lake, Sanders, Mineral and Lincoln counties tackle underage drinking with the Social Host Ordinance Bill

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For those of you who have been closely following what is on the agenda this legislative session, you probably know there are several bills that are looking to reduce the availability of drugs and alcohol to minors.

One of those bills is House Bill 0020. This is a bill that would allow counties to have the authority to implement a Social Host Ordinance at the local level.

What exactly does that mean? Right now, counties do not have the authority to enact such an ordinance at a local level. In order for counties to enact this type of ordinance, a Sate Representative or Senator must present a bill to the Legislature requesting legislative permission to enact a law that individual counties can adopt.

This is what HB20 is proposing and would make it so that each individual county can decide for themselves if they wanted to implement a social host ordinance. This would give the power where it should be – to the local level policy makers.

But, what exactly is a Social Host Ordinance? A social host ordinance is a tool counties – and cities – can use to reduce youth access to alcohol. You may be thinking, "don't we already have enough laws to address underage drinking?" A Social Host Ordinance would create another tool that law enforcement can use to reduce underage drinking in the state of Montana.

This ordinance would allow for property owners or renters – whoever is in physical control of the property – who knowingly allow underage drinking to occur on their property to be held accountable – including minors who host underage drinking parties while their parents are gone. Currently, when law enforcement respond to a call that is dealing with underage drinking, they can only cite the adult providers if they have witnesses or other proof that the adult provided the alcohol. Minor in Possession citations are given to underage drinkers who are caught drinking or who have been drinking. A Social Host Ordinance takes this one step further. Whoever is hosting the underage drinking party – regardless if they provided the alcohol or not – can be cited and must appear in court.

Wouldn't such a law interfere with personal property rights? This question seems to be the question that is the greatest concern to many of our citizens. The reality of the matter is that providing alcohol to minors is, in fact, illegal. Therefore, giving a host a citation for hosting an illegal underage drinking party is not a violation of personal property rights. When law enforcement happens to conduct an illegal drug bust on someone's property the public generally supports their actions. Underage drinking parties fall under the same category. Alcohol is an illegal drug for anyone under the age of 21.

Aren't kids going to drink anyway? Isn't it better to give them a "safe" place to drink where there is an adult present and someone who can take away the keys so that they don't drive home drunk? It is very encouraging to see so many Montanans dramatically changing their views on drinking and driving. However, when it comes to underage drinking there are many more dangers than just keeping kids from driving after they have been drinking.

The last decade or so has brought significant advances to medical technology and with those advances we now have a much clearer understanding of the potentially life long negative effects that alcohol has on a developing teenage brain.

The more immediate effects of alcohol that can be seen at underage drinking parties are; fights, some of which even turn deadly, there is a high rate of sexual assaults that occur at underage drinking parties, and, as most people know, alcohol often leads to an increase in risky sexual behavior. The bottom line is there are too many risks involved with underage drinking. Equally important are the liability issues, which adults can be held accountable for when they provide alcohol, or a place to drink alcohol for minors.

Really, when you think about it, if it weren't for adults who were willing to provide alcohol to kids there would be very few ways for kids to access alcohol. Yes, there will always be kids who try to get alcohol and who drink. But, what we can do... what we need to do, is to make sure that kids have as few opportunities as possible to access alcohol, as opposed to encouraging and condoning underage drinking by contributing to it.

Our individual futures depend on it and so does the future of Montana. Please support us in our efforts to keep us, as kids, safe from alcohol, as well as helping reduce the effects and costs associated with underage drinking here in Montana.

HB20 is a good step in the right direction. Not only will it give counties a tool that can be used to help reduce underage drinking, it also puts control where it should be – in the hands of local policy makers.

"Whoever is hosting the party – regardless if they provided the alcohol or not – can be cited and must appear in court."