



March 30, 2011

To: Senate Local Government Committee

From: Melanie Reynolds, on behalf of the Association of Montana Public Health Officials

RE: HB 20, authorizing counties to establish social host ordinances

For the record, my name is Melanie Reynolds and I am the Health Officer for Lewis and Clark County. I am here today representing the Montana Public Health Association, which is an organization of public health professionals throughout Montana. We wish to go on record as members of local public health in support of HB 20. Here is what we know:

- Underage drinking a major public health problem in Montana
- A third of Montana youths engaged in binge drinking in the past month (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 2007)
- Montana ranks 12th highest among states for the cost per youth of underage drinking: more than \$250 million in 2007 (Pacific Institute for Research & Evaluation)
- Consequences include work loss, traffic accidents, violent and property crimes, risky sexual behavior, suicides, and deaths
- More teens die as result of alcohol abuse than all other illegal drugs combined (YRBSS)
- Alcohol has long-term negative impacts on developing adolescent's brain: may prevent full development of good judgment and impulse control, damage memory and learning, and increase risk of mental illness
- A study found that the younger a person begins drinking alcohol, the more likely they are to become problem adult drinkers (National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2003)
- Parents who host underage drinking parties are giving their implicit approval of drinking and law-breaking
- They teach our youth that they can't have fun without drinking and help to produce our next generation of drunk drivers and alcoholics
- Shouldn't local communities have whatever tools they think they need to make sure their youth reach their full potential, both individually and as contributing members of that community?
- Shouldn't we be encouraging parents to teach their children that underage drinking is not acceptable?

Model social host programs have proven that effectively limiting access to alcohol can directly reduce teen drinking (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration). I'd like to thank Representative Hendrick for bringing this important legislation forward and I'd strongly encourage your support.