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Cody's Law – A Successful Statewide Collaboration for Social Host in Oklahoma

On June 8, 2011, Governor Mary Fallin signed an amended version of Oklahoma's Social Host Law which includes low-point beer and graduated offenses. Known as "Cody's Law", in memory of Cody Greenhaw who died in 2004 at age 16 from an alcohol and drug overdose at the house of a friend where adults were present, the updated law is an improvement on an earlier law to address social host problems. It is specific and requires proof of wrongdoing. The law, which went into effect November 1, 2011, states:

"No person shall knowingly and willfully permit an individual under the age of 21 years who is an invitee of said person in the person's residence...room owned, occupied, leased...on any land owned, occupied, leased or otherwise procured by the person, to possess or consume any alcoholic beverage, low point beer or any controlled dangerous drugs. Any person who violates this section, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor the first two convictions and a felony upon the third conviction."

Under the bill, anyone who allows underage drinking on their property could be charged with a misdemeanor and face \$500 fines.

The new law is the culmination of several years of efforts to address the issue of underage social access to alcohol in Oklahoma. Even as recently as 2010, according to the Oklahoma Prevention Needs Assessment (OPNA), of Oklahoma 12th graders who reported drinking alcohol within the past year approximately 80% consumed it at a friend's house or at a party and 70% of them reported getting it from adults over 21. To address the continuing problem of underage social access to alcohol and the enforcement challenges it poses Oklahoma's EUDL program supported an underage drinking prevention initiative entitled 2Much2Lose which promoted collaboration between communities and the state prevention network to strengthen local and state policies. Sometimes getting an effective law passed that impacts all jurisdictions happens in degrees and requires both local and state level engagement, collaboration and persistence. Such is the case in Oklahoma. In 2006, the City of Edmond became the first city in Oklahoma to pass a municipal Social Host Ordinance. That same year the first Cody's

Law was passed. It was the impetus for getting state level policy change to address Social Host issues. However, the first law had limitations because it required the death or dismemberment of the youth before the host would be charged, seriously limiting its reach. In addition, only a felony charge could be issued, and the law did not include low-point beer. Because of these limitations, the Oklahoma Prevention Network continued to support and pass local ordinances that included misdemeanor charges, would not require death or dismemberment and would address low-point beer. Throughout Oklahoma, from 2006 through 2011, more than 100 communities passed Social Host Ordinances. Even with these local ordinances in place law enforcement complained that local ordinances could only be enforced within the city limits and did not address the unincorporated areas in the counties. A tougher State Law was needed.

To ensure all locations across the state were included, the network advocated for the new inclusions to Cody's Law. The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS), Oklahoma's EUDL supported 2Much2Lose initiative and Oklahoma Prevention Network, community advocates, law enforcement agencies, and many others worked tirelessly to bring this improved state policy to fruition. While the network is celebrating this success, additional work continues. The ODMHSAS and network have developed and initiated a statewide media advocacy campaign to spread the message that this law exists, educate law enforcement on use of the law, and train law enforcement and community coalitions on ensuring the law's effectiveness. This success story demonstrates the effectiveness of persistence and continued collaborations.

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