

April, 2009

Dear Parent/Guardian:

It's that time of year again, as the next few months will be filled with graduations, proms and other celebratory events for our children. In anticipation, I write to urge you to do all that you can to make it a happy and safe time for your child.

Each year, we lose far too many of our teenagers to motor vehicle crashes, with a dramatic increase in alcohol-related traffic fatalities on prom weekends throughout our county. Car crashes are the leading cause of death for young adults between the ages of 15-20, and the reality is that many of those deaths are caused by teenage impaired driving.

You, as a parent or guardian, are in a pivotal position to ensure the safety of your children by educating them on the reality of alcohol-related tragedies. By helping them make the right choices around impaired driving, you could not only save the lives of your children, but of others as well. These tragedies are purely preventable, and you, along with proactive education and tough law enforcement, can help shape your child's decision on whether or not to engage in risky behavior.

It's also important to remind parents and guardians that it is a crime to provide alcohol to those under the age of 21, even at a supervised party at your own home. It is also important to know that if you choose to host a party where alcohol is served to minors, you can be held liable if one of your guests drinks alcohol at your home and harms themselves or others by the negligent operation of a motor vehicle.

Finally, please remember to stress to your children that driving after drinking any amount of alcohol could potentially result in a driving under the influence offense. For those under the age of 21, driving under the influence in Massachusetts is defined by a 0.02 blood alcohol level. This level can easily be reached by just one drink and carries the very serious criminal penalties of an OUI offense, possibly marring your child's chance at getting into college, applying for jobs and even participating in graduation.

We know this topic is difficult and that's why we've provided you with ideas for safe alternatives, in order to ensure everyone's safety during this celebratory season:

- **If you are able to, hire professional transportation for your children's prom night.** Make sure you have a discussion with the limousine driver prior to prom night about your expectations that the ride be alcohol-free. Sometimes these drivers will agree to purchase alcohol for their minor passengers; it is important to ensure that this will not happen by talking directly with the driver
- **Offer your children transportation alternatives.** Offer to provide your children rides or to have an older sibling or family friend provide rides for your children

on prom night. If your child does not want you to pick them up, oftentimes a sibling or family friend is a great compromise.

- **Provide your child with the phone number of a local taxi company** with a positive reputation and make plans to pay for your children's taxi fare for the night. Remember, this is a small cost to keep your child safe.
- **Make sure to exchange cell phone numbers** so that your child can reach you in a moment's notice.

We have seen first-hand the devastating impact that impaired driving under the influence can have on parents, families, friends and communities, and urge you to be proactive in preventing teenage drinking and driving. We believe these alternatives will help to discourage impaired driving without infringing on your child's desire for fun and independence.

Thank you and please contact us with any questions that you may have, or if you would like further information on teenage impaired driving.

Please be safe and enjoy this wonderful time of year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gerry Leone". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Gerry Leone
Middlesex District Attorney

Joseph F. Casey
Superintendent