



**Week of August 15, 2005**

## CLOSING A LOOPHOLE TO SAVE LIVES

It seems that almost every day I read or hear about a young local person hurt or killed in an accident where, more often than not, it involves alcohol.

Everywhere I look I see the window stickers and roadside crosses placed by loved ones as an expression of grief and remembrance of lost friends.

I have been touched personally by the loss of friends, neighbors, and constituents through immature actions of people under the influence.

That is why I was proud to help pass a bill this year that will hopefully help more young people say "no" when they are confronted with the temptation to drink underage. Senate Bill 402, sponsored by Senate President Pro-Tem Michael Gibbons, can help younger Missourians use commonsense as they now will run the risk of losing some of their freedoms if they choose to drink.

The new law takes effect Aug. 28 and lists possession *and* consumption of alcohol by minors as misdemeanors. Before, there was a loophole that allowed law enforcement officers to act only if a minor was caught with a drink in their hand or car. Now, a minor could be found guilty of a "minor in possession" if he or she is visibly intoxicated or has a blood alcohol content of more than .02. Plus, any minor found guilty of a "MIP" would now lose his or her driver's license for 30 days for a first offense and 90 days for a second offense.

The measure also cracks down on so-called "house parties" and the parents who allow them. It prohibits adults from allowing minors to drink on their private property unless they are the minor's legal guardian.

We did not pass this law to punish kids or parents; we passed this law to try to hold people accountable for their irresponsible decisions. If they want to act in a dangerous manner and put themselves, other people, and property at risk, there must be sufficient consequences. This law simply establishes those consequences.

The legislature worked with many young Missourians, parents, school districts, law enforcement officials and others in creating this law. **There was no question something had to be done when we learned that 4 out of 5 Missouri highschoolers have tried alcohol and, even more alarming, 1 out of 3 admitted to being a binge drinker.**

My gray hair may make you think differently, but not long ago I was young and knew what it was like to blow off a little steam having fun. That said, I believe every one of these changes is another way to help a young person say "no" to drinking, and to drinking and driving.

Too many lives are being lost, changed, and impaired by the poor decisions of some young folks. By passing these commonsense penalties, maybe we can help instill a little more commonsense in our kids the next time they're offered a drink.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dan Clemens". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Dan Clemens  
State Senator  
20<sup>th</sup> District

Editor: For confirmation, please contact Chief of Staff Gus Wagner toll free at 1-866-376-2538.