

## **GUEST OPINION: Making a healthy city, 07-28-09**

By Tom Pasternak and Jasiel Correia

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On behalf of the BOLD Coalition, we commend the members of the Fall River Licensing Board for their professional demeanor, fair and consistent weighing of consequences for violations of alcohol sales laws and regulations, and for strictly enforcing them.

Why is enforcement of alcohol laws and regulations so important for our community?

Our biggest youth substance use problem is alcohol. In the state, 46 percent of high school youths report use of alcohol in the last month.

This is true of Greater Fall River, too. We know from evidence-based research that one of the most effective ways to reduce underage use of alcohol is to reduce access to it. One way to reduce access is to make sure that businesses strictly adhere to the 21 and over law.

The Fall River Police Department and the Licensing Board are making it very clear to store owners that their licenses are in jeopardy if they fail to follow the law on underage sales. Strict enforcement curbs underage sales.

On July 8, members of the Licensing Board — John Saulino, chairperson, Theresa Esposito and Eric Santos, ably assisted by Kerri Ayash — worked with 21 store owners who had been issued citations for violating regulations. Each licensee was afforded due process.

Members of the Police Department, who are charged with enforcing alcohol laws and regulations, presented their cases in a professional manner as well and are to be commended for their work.

The Licensing Board is working with Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol, a subcommittee of the BOLD Coalition based at SSTAR. Liquor store owners cited for underage sales are now required to cooperate with the BOLD Coalition's program to place stickers on alcohol items in their stores that say, "HEY YOU!! It is ILLEGAL to provide alcohol to people under 21!"

These stickers remind adults that it is illegal to purchase alcohol for minors. This strategy helps reduce youth access to alcohol.

Another new policy enacted by the Licensing Board is that new licensees will be required to have their employees trained by a certified alcohol server training program called STOP. Current licensee owners will need to have their servers trained by the end of the year.

All alcohol servers in Fall River will learn: alcohol laws and regulations, steps to prevent intoxication, how to spot fake IDs, how to ask the right questions regarding IDs and other strategies to prevent underage service. This is another important step in reducing youth access to alcohol.

In addition, District Attorney Sam Sutter is coordinating a new underage alcohol prevention task force for Bristol County. He is collaborating with area police departments, schools and community drug use prevention coalitions to step up education and enforcement of the state's Social Host law, which makes it a criminal offense to provide alcohol to underage guests or allow them to drink alcohol in your home or on your property. He is to be commended for this initiative.

The kind of community collaboration described above can significantly reduce access of alcohol to youth and underage alcohol use.

A sincere thank you goes to the Licensing Board, Fall River Police Department, Sutter and all the other members of the BOLD Coalition. You are looking out for the future of our youth by enforcing the law, educating our community and enacting policies that protect our youth from the harmful affects of alcohol now and possible addiction issues in the future.

Together we create a healthy community for the youth of Greater Fall River.

Tom Pasternak