



*Nothing is politically right
that is morally wrong.*

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

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is the firmest friend of truth.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Senate Gives First Round Approval to Legislation
Increasing Penalties on Underage Drinking**

JEFFERSON CITY – The Senate gave first round approval today to legislation increasing and adding penalties on underage drinking including expanding a minor in possession to mean any minor who is drunk or visibly drunk. Senate President Pro Tem Michael R. Gibbons, R-Kirkwood, sponsored the measure concerning underage drinkers in Missouri as an attempt to help curb the growing epidemic. A shocking four out of five Missouri high schoolers acknowledged having tried alcohol and one out of three admit to being binge drinkers.

“This effort starts at home, then the schools and finally strengthens the tools law enforcement needs in order to crack down on minors that are drunk,” Gibbons said. “By making the message they hear from all these levels - home, school, community and law enforcement consistent, we are reinforcing that drinking at a young age is a bad choice.”

The measure, Senate Bill 402, changes misdemeanor penalties so it encompasses both the possession and consumption of alcohol by minors. Under the act, a minor could now 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. SB 402 also prohibits adults from allowing minors to drink on their private property unless they are the minor’s legal guardian.

“Protecting our children must start at home,” Gibbons said. “That’s why this bill goes beyond teenagers by holding adults responsible who sponsor these so-called house parties that encourage underage drinking.”

The measure also requires school districts to create a policy detailing the consequences of any student found either possessing or drinking alcohol whether on or off school property. An amendment to the bill also suspends a minor’s driver’s license for two years for a first alcohol-related traffic offense, and four years for any further offenses. It also requires minors caught drinking under the age of 16 to wait until they are 18 before being able to get his or her license.

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“Some students told us that losing their license isn’t as important as losing out on school activities when it comes to making the right choice on alcohol,” Gibbons said. “Every single student in Missouri is going to be confronted with underage drinking. These changes are part of an effort to help them say no when that day comes.”

Gibbons served as chairman of the Joint Interim Committee on Underage Drinking which released a final report last November recommending ways to combat the underage drinking dilemma. Gibbons’ legislation draws from those recommendations based on testimony from students, parents, school officials and law enforcement officers from across the state.

The bill must receive a final round of approval from the Senate before moving to the House where it will receive similar consideration.

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