

'Under Age, 'Under Arrest'

Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control Board's new program targets underage drinking

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Underage drinking is a serious concern nationwide, and a new program in Alabama is working to increase awareness of the dangers.

The program, "Under Age, Under Arrest," is an initiative of the Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control Board (ABC), the agency tasked with enforcing alcohol, tobacco and drug laws in Alabama. The effort was launched Nov. 6, 2013, with a program at Prattville High School.

The goal of the program is to make parents and teens aware of the health and safety issues surrounding alcohol abuse by minors, according to Mac Gipson, administrator of the ABC Board.

"Underage drinking and binge drinking remain big problems in Alabama and the nation, taking or ruining many lives every year," Gipson said. "The ABC Board wants students and parents to understand both the legal and social

costs of such irresponsible drinking," he said.

According to the 2009 Youth Risk Survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than one-third of Alabama high school students admitted to current alcohol use at the time of the survey. More than two-thirds of those surveyed said they had tried alcohol in the past.

Many of those underage drinkers do not realize the heavy physical and emotional toll that alcohol can take, said Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP), one of the organizations partnering with the ABC Board on the initiative.

At an "Under Age, Under Arrest" event at McAdory High School on Nov. 19, Godfrey urged students to refrain from taking that first drink and asked those who are already drinking to stop.

Godfrey and other speakers also emphasized the dangers of binge drinking, a behavior defined as having several drinks (five for males, four for females) within a very short span of time. According to a report by the U.S. Department of Justice, about 90 percent of the alcohol consumed by youth under the age of 21 in the United States is in the form of binge drinking, such as taking shots.

Binge drinking

Julie Nix, director of counseling services at Jacksonville State University, believes that peer pressure is a significant factor in binge drinking. "Students often think they need to blow off steam, to unwind, to party hard," Nix said. "Also binge drinking is often situational — a football game, the end of finals, a big party. It's a long-standing rite of passage."

Binge drinking and alcohol use in general can bring long-lasting consequences as well. In 2010, 10,228 people were killed in alcohol-impaired driving crashes, accounting for nearly one-third of all traffic-related deaths in the United States, according

to CDC statistics. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism estimates that 5,000 people under the age of 21 die annually from alcohol-related car crashes,

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**Mac Gipson
administrator, Alabama Alcoholic
Beverage Control Board**

homicides, suicides, alcohol poisoning, accidents and injuries. Thousands more seek help at emergency rooms each year for alcohol-related injuries, including physical assault, sexual assault and date rape.

"In almost all sexual assault cases we see, alcohol is involved," Nix said. "Communication gets blurrier when you start drinking."

All these reasons and more are why Alabama needs a program like "Under Age, Under Arrest," Gipson

said. In partnership with schools, local agencies and community organizations statewide, the initiative will remind teens that under Alabama law, it is not only illegal for those under 21 to drink, but minors can be

arrested, fined and sent to jail for drinking or possessing wine, beer or liquor. In addition, ads and billboards will remind parents and other adults that anyone who provides alcohol to minors also can be arrested, fined or jailed.

Studies show that more than half of underage drinkers get their alcohol from family and friends and they often consume that alcohol in the home, Gipson said. Such numbers emphasize the importance of the ABC Board's effort to prevent underage drinking.

'Click it or Ticket'

"We want to make the 'Under Age, Under Arrest' as synonymous with underage drinking as the 'Click it or Ticket' slogan is with wearing seatbelts," Gipson said.

Schools or organizations interested in hosting an "Under Age, Under Arrest" event or in getting involved to spread the message of the campaign can find information and resources at www.underage-underarrest.com.

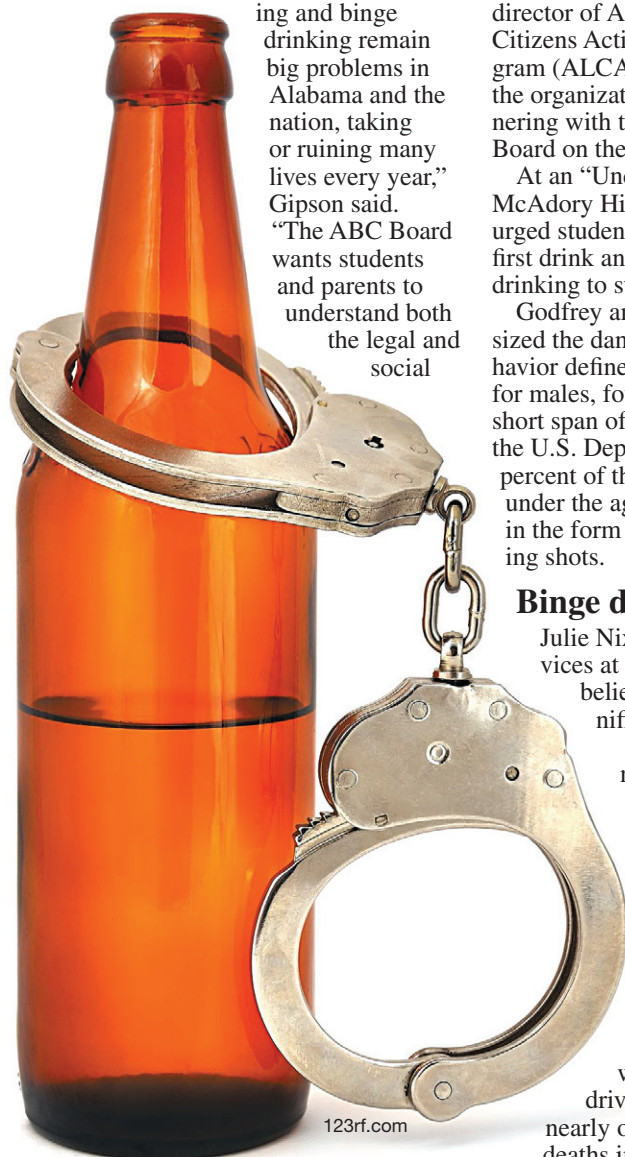
"We'll take this around the state," Gipson said.

"As the state (ABC) agency, we see it as our responsibility to do what we can to police and discourage this form of irresponsible drinking." ❧

Fast facts of underage drinking

- ▶ Underage drinking costs the citizens of Alabama **\$1 billion** a year. The costs come from medical care, loss of work, and pain and suffering associated with the multiple problems resulting from the use of alcohol by youth.
- ▶ Each year, about **5,000 people** under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking. These include deaths from drunk driving, other accidents, homicides, suicides and alcohol poisoning.
- ▶ More than **190,000 people** under age 21 are sent to emergency rooms for alcohol-related injuries each year.
- ▶ Young bodies and developing brains are especially ill-suited for the effects of alcohol.
- ▶ In Alabama, it is **illegal for anyone under the age of 21** to consume or possess any alcoholic beverage. Underage drinkers and the adults who provide them alcoholic beverages are subject to arrest and possibly jail. And underage drinkers will have their driver's licenses suspended.

Source: www.underage-underarrest.com



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