



Mission: *To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy*

Vision: *Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities*

SB 209 – Criminal Law - Unruly Social Gatherings - Civil Penalties

Hearing Date: 1/29/2020

Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Position: SUPPORT

Thank you to Senators Smith and Waldstreicher and the rest of the Judicial Proceedings committee for hearing our testimony today on this important legislation and a special thank you to Senator West for introducing SB209. I am Raimee Eck, Immediate Past President and Advocacy Committee Chair for the Maryland Public Health Association.

Social host laws aim to reduce youth alcohol consumption by addressing the social environment in which youth reside. The targets are the hosts themselves, which may be other underage youth or young adults, parents or landlords of rental property.

At this time, there is only criminal law on the books in Maryland to address these types of gatherings, and there is a high burden to prove criminal intent. Additionally, it is generally undesirable to pin a criminal charge to a young person for hosting underage or nuisance parties. This law enables law enforcement to issue civil penalties—similar to a speeding ticket—to the hosts of loud and unruly parties.

Five locations in Maryland have already implemented a similar law with noted success: Baltimore City, Baltimore County (around Towson and UMBC), Frostburg, College Park, and Princess Anne. In general, they have seen reductions in calls for service related to large house parties, reductions in excessive drinking at house parties among college students; two jurisdictions saw a 70% drop in complaint calls for excessive noise.

Public health interventions to improve health are most effective when they are multi-pronged and multi-leveled and address issues such as advertising, availability, access, and the overall environment and when coupled with reasonable penalties that are still at a level for effective deterrence. This is an additional tool for law enforcement to address problem gatherings and provide a safe, peaceful, and enjoyable neighborhood for all residents.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education efforts and advocacy of public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 150-year-old professional organization with more than 20,000 members dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.