



Everything Michigan

Michigan bill exempts underage drinkers who call 911

By The Associated Press

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LANSING - Minors wouldn't be prosecuted for underage drinking if they or their friends call 911 for medical assistance under legislation approved Wednesday with backing from Michigan law enforcement and college students.

The measure is designed to prevent cases where minors are too afraid to call authorities, and they or their friends die from alcohol poisoning or other health problems as a result.

"Is the risk of one's possible life one that we want students taking a gamble on? We sure hope not," said Kyle Dysarz, chairperson of Michigan State University's student assembly, a leading supporter of the bill.

The legislation, which passed 13-0 in the House Judiciary Committee, goes to the full House for its likely approval and then across the Capitol to the Senate.

Under state law, minors caught drinking alcohol for the first time face up to a \$100 fine along with the potential for substance abuse screening and treatment. Jail time is possible for three or more offenses.

East Lansing police Chief Tom Wibert said his department has not been citing underage drinkers who call for medical attention for 10 years. But it would be nice to have a written policy, he said.

Ingham County Medical Examiner Dean Slenko also got behind the legislation, testifying that Michigan State University students and others are trying to do the right thing by seeking changes in the law.

"I don't know whether they do this because of ignorance or they do it because they are afraid of legal consequences to themselves," he said of minors who don't call 911 after binge drinking. "But the message should be clear: If someone has consumed too much alcohol or any substance for that matter, they need professional medical attention."

The measure is supported by the Student Association of Michigan, a group representing student governments at all but two of Michigan's 15 public universities.

The bill's sponsor, House Judiciary Chairman Mark Meadows, said the idea was first recommended in 1998 when he was a member of the Alcohol Action Team, which was created to attack campus drinking problems in the aftermath of a student riot at Michigan State.

"It has taken a long time to get us here, way too long," the East Lansing Democrat said.

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