

Marshall County Family Resource Network, Inc.



www.marshallcountyfrn.com

Stacie Dei, Executive Director

324 – 7th Street
Moundsville, WV 26041

Phone: 304-845-3300

Fax: 304-845-3360

E-Mail: marshallcountyfrn@comcast.net

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Contact: Paul J. Gough, 304-845-3300, frnpr@comcast.net

FRN Helps Effort to Change Youth-Alcohol Law

MOUNDSVILLE, WV – The use of alcoholic beverages by minors is now a juvenile delinquency offense, thanks to a revision of the Code of West Virginia passed this spring by the West Virginia Legislature.

Previously, underage drinking was a status offense that was referred to the state Department of Health and Human Resources. Now, under the provisions of House Bill 2877 that took effect July 10, the use of alcoholic beverages by minors will become a misdemeanor act of juvenile delinquency punishable by up to 72 hours in a juvenile detention facility and a fine between \$100 and \$500. It can also include, in lieu of the fine or incarceration, probation up to one year.

The original bill was shepherded through the West Virginia Senate by Jeffrey V. Kessler, D-2nd District, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and then during conference merged with House Bill 2877 and was supported by both Houses of the West Virginia Legislature. The new law received strong support in Marshall County from Sheriff John Gruzinskas, Magistrate Bill Anderson and Marshall County Family Resource Network executive director Stacie Dei and substance abuse prevention director Latrisha Whitelatch. It caps an effort that took the past two legislative sessions.

Sheriff Gruzinskas said that after taking office as sheriff, he heard from Prosecutor Jeff Kramer and then-Judge John Madden who said that as long as underage drinking is a status offense, there would never be any headway in curing the problem. HB 2877 was a step in that direction.

“On the legislative calendar, this may have been seen as some small, obscure bill,” Sheriff Gruzinskas said. “On the contrary, for the health of our children and our children’s future, this was one of the most important bills passed.”

Strengthening the penalty for underage drinking will hopefully have the effect of preventing young people from alcohol use.

Sen. Kessler said that the best way to treat alcohol-related issues and to prevent later social costs are to prevent them from occurring.

“Prevention and intervention are the keys to reducing the future costs for society created by abuse,” he said. It appears to me the best way to prevent substance abuse problems and addictions are to keep young people from exposure and from using alcohol as a gateway to other drugs.”

The Marshall County Family Resource Network is a not-for-profit organization that builds community partnerships to make Marshall County a better place to live and work. The FRN’s key efforts focus on substance abuse prevention, health and wellness and community development. It has leveraged more than \$2.2 million in state and federal grants to help Marshall County over the past three years. It can be reached at 304-845-3300 or on the Web at marshallcountyfrn.com.