

Statement from Richard Yoast, PhD
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“The recent coverage of the May 4 hazing incident in Northbrook, Illinois, has focused heavily on the “shock” of high school girls beating up on other girls and the nature of that violent act. But what is getting less attention is the presence of alcohol – kegs were provided to the teenagers by parents. Alcohol in our society is readily available and many adults seem more than willing to supply underage drinkers. There has been limited news coverage about how easy it is for underage youth to obtain beer. According to the Monitoring the Future Study by the University of Michigan, 85 percent of 10th graders and 94 percent of 12th graders say it is very or fairly easy to get alcohol. It is clear that alcohol was a contributing factor in this incident.

“The type of behavior we are seeing in Northbrook and elsewhere is not unexpected. Violent crime is the number one cost of underage drinking. Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions and A Matter of Degree, two national initiatives funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and housed at the American Medical Association, have organized efforts across the country to address the ease at which youth and young people are encouraged to drink early and often. Communities need stronger policies that discourage underage drinking and must enact and enforce laws that hold adults responsible for providing alcohol to underage youth.

“One solution is keg registration which has been adopted in 19 states and many communities across the country. Keg registration is a tool for law enforcement to identify and punish adults who buy and provide beer kegs to underage youth. With keg registration, each keg has an identification number. The number and buyer’s information is kept at the store of purchase. When a beer keg is confiscated, law enforcement can easily trace the keg to the adult provider – not as in Northbrook where police are having difficulty in identifying the adult/s who bought the alcohol. Keg registration laws with enforcement become a deterrent to adult providers.

“Also, many state and local police departments have set up “party” patrols, including hotlines, to prevent and break-up underage drinking parties before they get out of control. Just as important we need to regulate the alcohol industry that promotes an environment that makes underage drinking look like a benign “party” activity of popular girls and boys.”