

Support —Written Testimony

House Judiciary Committee

House Bill 654: Criminal Law – Unruly Social Gatherings – Civil Penalties

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On behalf of Maryland's independent colleges and universities and the 65,600 students we serve, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony to support **House Bill 654: Criminal Law – Unruly Social Gatherings – Civil Penalties**. This bill allows law enforcement agencies to write civil citations to hosts of unruly house parties. Under current Maryland law, officers only have the option to charge persons criminally who allow underage individuals to consume alcohol in their homes. As a result, there is often reluctance to charge hosts of parties because of the severity of these charges.

A statewide civil social host law, as proposed in this bill, would allow officers to levy fines that increase in severity for subsequent offenses at the same location. Several local jurisdictions in Maryland have already passed social host ordinances. These jurisdictions have seen reductions in calls for service related to noise and excessive drinking at house parties. College and university campuses located in these areas have seen corresponding reductions in the number of students who report drinking at off-campus parties and in the number of students who engage in binge drinking.

The Maryland Collaborative to Reduce College Drinking and Related Problems, which is advocating for this legislation, is a group of 15 two-year and four-year Maryland colleges and universities that uses research-based evidence to address excessive college student drinking behavior and related harms. Six MICUA members are part of the Collaborative: Goucher College, Hood College, Johns Hopkins University, Loyola University Maryland, McDaniel College, and Notre Dame of Maryland University. According to a Collaborative report, Maryland college students who drank at an off-campus house party in the past month were three times more likely to injure someone, damage property, perform poorly on a test or project, or get in trouble with campus police, as compared with those students who did not. These students were also twice as likely to miss class or get in trouble with off-campus police, and more than 1.5 times as likely to ride with a drinking driver, experience sexual misconduct, or have unprotected sex.

Excessive, harmful, and underage drinking is a public health problem that has a significant impact on a student's physical and emotional well-being and academic and social experience in college. Civil citations are one response to addressing these issues and behaviors in off-campus settings. They are potentially less burdensome, allow for swifter action, and more likely to be administered.

For these reasons, MICUA urges a favorable Committee report for HB 654.