

# The Baltimore City Safe and Quiet Neighborhoods Ordinance

## The Problem: Loud and Unruly House Parties

Crowds blocking the street and sidewalk, public urination, vandalism, loud music playing all hours of the night, littering, sexual assaults and fights – these are some of the problems neighbors in Baltimore City experience as a result of loud and unruly house parties. These quality of life issues and resulting decreased property values are major sources of frustration for residents living in neighborhoods with party houses.

Nearby residents are not the only ones whose health and safety are compromised as a result of these parties. Too often, young people engage in excessive drinking, which can lead to a range of alcohol-related problems, including sexual assaults, drinking and driving and violence<sup>1</sup> as well as other consequences such as blackouts, vomiting and alcohol poisoning.

In Maryland, students who drank at an off-campus party in the past month were more than 1.5 times as likely to ride with a drinking driver, be taken advantage of sexually, have unprotected sex, or have sex with someone without their consent, compared to those who did not drink at an off-campus party.<sup>2</sup>

*“On our way to church this morning, my wife and I were struck by the sight of several bright red plastic cups strewn in the street... it was clear that serious drinking is taking place in that house by the beer bottles and cans that were strewn all over the front porch and steps...”*

*Many student tenants have had a history of drunken, sloppy behaviors that have made life difficult for those of us who simply want a quality life in a quiet neighborhood.”*

*Baltimore City Resident*



## A Possible Solution: A Safe and Quiet Neighborhoods Ordinance

COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY have responded to these problems with local ordinances to support safe and quiet neighborhoods. Also known as “social host ordinances,” in Baltimore City such an ordinance can:

- Allow the police to write civil citations, similar to traffic tickets, to the property owners, property managers and/or hosts of loud and unruly parties;
- Levy a \$500 fine for a first offense, and a \$1,000 fine for subsequent offences within a 12 month period;
- Do away with the burdensome administrative requirements of the current Neighborhood Nuisance law;
- Make law enforcement’s job easier, making the law more effective, and making neighborhoods safer, healthier, and more enjoyable for all.

## Safe and Quiet Neighborhoods Ordinance Success Stories

Petaluma, California's social host ordinance led to a reduction in police calls for service related to disturbances the year after the ordinance passed.<sup>3</sup> Research studies have found that adolescents living in jurisdictions with social host policies were less likely to drink in large peer groups compared to adolescents who lived in communities without such policies.<sup>45</sup>



### Goals of a Baltimore City Safe and Quiet Neighborhoods Ordinance Include...

- Reduce loud and unruly parties on private residential property and the many problems associated with them. Meaningful fines will deter tenants and property owners from hosting loud and unruly gatherings that disturb the peace and safety of Baltimore neighborhoods.
- Reduce excessive college drinking and related problems. By reducing loud and unruly parties where excessive drinking often occurs, student safety, health, and success can be improved.
- Free up police resources. Since 2012, neighborhoods near one university in Baltimore made an average of 174 calls per academic year. The ordinance can reduce the need to respond multiple times to disperse parties at problem properties. This can free up resources to respond to regular and emergency situations, and improve police services to the whole community.

For More Information, Contact:

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## References

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<sup>2</sup> Maryland Collaborative to Reduce College Drinking and Related Problems. *High-risk Drinking among College Students in Maryland: Identifying Targets for Intervention*. Baltimore and College Park: Maryland Collaborative, 2014; available at <http://marylandcollaborative.org/maryland-college-alcohol-survey/>.

<sup>3</sup> Sparks M. Using enforcement to reduce underage drinking. <http://www.eiu.edu/ihec/Sparks-Illinois-enforcement-webinar.ppt>; Sparksinitiative; 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Wagoner KG, Sparks M, Francisco VT, Wyrick D, Nichols T, Wolfson M. Social Host Policies and Underage Drinking Parties. *Subst Use Misuse* 48(1-2):41-53, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Paschall MJ, Lipperman-Kreda S, Grube JW, Thomas S. Relationships between social host laws and underage drinking: Findings from a study of 50 California cities. *J Stud Alcohol Drugs* 75(6):901-907.