



Ministerial Statement
To The House of Assembly

By

The Hon. Michael Dunkley, JP MP
Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety

Spike in Underage Drinking

5th July, 2013

Mr. Speaker, Honorable Members will be aware that school is out! While the children are undoubtedly excited about lazy summer days, parents must be on guard because of the extra dangers that idle days bring.

Mr. Speaker, I am particularly concerned about underage drinking and the possibility of incidents of underage drinking peaking during summer months. This is a problem that the government will not ignore.

During the summer we will continue to focus our efforts towards preventing our young people from developing dangerous alcohol habits.

Mr. Speaker, underage drinking and associated problems have profound negative consequences for underage drinkers, their families, their communities, and the society as a whole. A person that begins to consume alcohol before the age of 18 is 4 times more likely to develop alcohol dependency than someone who waits until they are 21.

Honourable Members will recall a statement presented to the House earlier this year on the results of The National Survey of Drugs and Health among Middle and School Students in Bermuda. **Mr. Speaker,** the results of this survey revealed that that in 2011 more than half of the middle school aged student participants reported use of alcohol at some point in their lifetimes and 19.1 % said they had used alcohol in the past 30 days, with the first average initiation around age 12 years old.

Mr. Speaker, this survey suggests that a number of Bermuda's young people under the legal drinking age of 18 have experimented with alcohol. Many of these children report that the easiest place to obtain alcohol is in their own home. This is not to say that parents are deliberately providing their children with alcohol, but parents must take extra precautionary measures when storing alcohol in the home, especially in the case of older teenagers left home alone.

The dangers of alcohol use and abuse should be taught to children, and clear rules set.

Bermuda's summer time party atmosphere often portrays alcohol consumption in a positive light. Young people can be led to believe that alcohol makes everything more fun, so the desire to consume alcohol is strong. It's critical for adults to consistently demonstrate habits, values and messages that we'd like to see our children adopt.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that parents, guardians and the community as a whole set good examples for our young people.

We want to encourage all parents to continuously supervise their children in the summer months to ensure they are not participating in risky behaviors. Our young people are able to get involved in a variety of activities to prevent dangerous behaviors, such as summer camps, and swimming and snorkeling camps, dance camps and more. We need to be proactive and steer our young people in the right direction so they become positive members of society who are equipped to make well informed choices regarding alcohol behavior.

Thank You, Mr. Speaker.