**Social Host Ordinance – FAQs**

**Chaffee County, 2024**

1. **Is this really an issue in our community?**

*Yes, we are hearing that it is a real issue from multiple sources. First, from youth themselves, who talk about these parties allowed by permissive adults. Second, from parents who are concerned about their kids going to certain houses or locations where they know there have already been issues. Finally, from every law enforcement agency in the county, who report that this is an issue they face, and an ordinance they would like to see passed in Salida, Buena Vista, and the county.*

1. **I’m not for putting more punishments around drugs. Don’t we have enough laws already?**

*The ordinance is meant to address a gap in our local legislation around underage substance use, not to impose more strict punishments. Currently, when law enforcement personnel get called to an underage party, they have two options when it comes to the hosting adults: either give them a warning, or give them a felony charge of Contributing to the Delinquency of a Minor. A warning can seem ineffective, while a felony charge is often pled down in court or can seem too severe for the situation if no serious and immediate bodily harm is caused by or to the impaired youth. The hope for this ordinance is that it would provide a prevention-based middle ground for adult accountability, while reducing the overall felony charges and keeping those to only the most severe cases where it is warranted.*

1. **What is wrong with simply giving the felony charge of Contributing to the Delinquency of a Minor?**

*That specific charge is intended for situations where the underage person goes on to cause damage or harm to themselves or others while under the influence of substances. When it gets to court that felony is frequently pled down to a lesser charge. While that process of pleading down can help to tailor consequences appropriately, it also leaves room for bias and inequality around things like socioeconomic status and access to legal counsel, and potential bias or language barriers, among other issues. The intent of the ordinance is to provide prevention-based accountability proportionate to the situation in question.*

1. **Will this ordinance target some areas and groups of people more than others?**

*While there is rarely a solution that will eliminate the possibility of bias entirely, the Social Host Ordinance should be a step forward in reducing the possibility of inequality. Currently, a law enforcement officer responding to an underage party hosted by an adult has to make a determination whether they give that adult a felony or not. By having a more proportionate charge, and particularly one that foregrounds awareness and education in how its consequences are scaled, law enforcement personnel will be able to more confidently and universally cite responsible adults. That universal applicability should reduce situations of bias or inequality.*

1. **I think that parents providing a safe space for kids to experiment is actually a positive thing. Won’t this just encourage kids to go have more parties out in the woods unsupervised, where it is more dangerous?**

*While this ordinance will not solve all problems related to underage parties involving substances, it is a start, and something that will likely have immediate impact. The ordinance does not prevent adults from providing their own children with substances in a supervised context, something that is protected in Colorado law for freedom of religious expression and other reasons. The Social Host Ordinance would come into the picture when an adult is knowingly hosting parties involving substances for youth that aren’t their own kids, something that then becomes a community issue. There is empirical data showing that permissive attitudes towards youth substance use correlates with more frequent use by young people, leading to changes in the developing brain and greater risk of addiction and substance misuse later in life.*