



March 22, 2004

Letter to the Editor
Enid News and Eagle
227 W. Broadway
Enid, OK 73701

Dear Editor:

Your March 18th editorial regarding the dangers of underage drinking – and who should bear the consequences – was right on target. Adults need to know that underage drinking is a serious problem in Oklahoma and that it needs to be taken seriously, not as just another act of teenage rebellion.

As the state agency responsible for reducing substance abuse in Oklahoma, we know that children who begin drinking alcohol before age 15 are four times more likely to become alcoholics than those who begin drinking at age 21. It is a major factor in the four leading causes of death among teens – car wrecks, accidents, homicides and suicides – and contributes to sexual activity that may result in unplanned pregnancy. Alcohol is, in fact, one of the most toxic drugs used by adolescents, killing more teenagers than all illicit drugs combined.

We must stop sale of beer to minors at the source. Owners and clerks at convenience stores, gas stations, grocery stores – and any other location where minors can purchase alcohol – should pay a price for selling beer to minors. By the same token, adults who purchase beer for minors also should pay a price. Once a child or adolescent consumes alcohol, there is no way to determine the final outcome. The end result could be death, life-altering injury or any of a variety of tragic consequences.

Awareness and prevention play significant roles in changing behaviors and attitudes, but the role of the media is unmistakable. Items such as your editorial are key to creating awareness, understanding and ultimately, action.

We commend *The Enid News and Eagle* for bringing the issue of underage drinking to the forefront.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Brown". The signature is stylized with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Ben Brown
Deputy Commissioner, Substance Abuse Services
Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services