

## **ASSEMBLYMEMBER JOE COTO**

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### **Assemblymember Joe Coto wants our students to Have a safe and sober graduation**

When a student is handed a diploma, the future is bright and full of promise. Graduation time is filled with excitement, anticipation and celebration of what the future holds in store. It is exciting not only for the approximately 7,000 students graduating in San Jose this year, but for the graduate's family and friends as well.

Graduation is also a time for events and festivities, which all too often are accompanied by an alarming increase in teen deaths due to drunk or drug-impaired, driving. Motor vehicle-related injuries are the leading cause of death for 15-to-25-year-olds. During a past graduation period in California, according to statistics provided by the California Highway Patrol, over fifty drunk drivers between the ages of 15 to 25 were involved in fatal crashes.

Declaring June as "Sober Graduation Month" in California affirms the importance of protecting our children from alcohol- and drug-related deaths and injuries. I hope it will also encourage schools and community organizations to sponsor alcohol- and drug-free events where young people can safely celebrate graduation.

This year, the California Highway Patrol has once again joined forces with local communities to support a statewide effort to save the lives of young people through the "sober graduation" program. The Sober Graduation Campaign has been an effective, anti-drunk-driving effort directed at high school seniors.

Some, however, still believe that a youngster should be allowed to celebrate graduation with a toast to "honor" the move into adulthood. This, however, could be detrimental. When school-age youth are allowed to drink alcohol they are more likely, not less likely, to develop serious behavioral and health problems related to the use of alcohol and other drugs.

There are several laws in California that address this issue. It is illegal for persons under 21 years of age to possess or use alcohol. Contributing to the delinquency of a minor is an equally serious offense; adults can be held legally responsible for any minor's injury caused by the minor's use of alcohol in the adult's residence.

In California, possession of an alcoholic beverage by a minor is punishable by a monetary fine as well as the mandatory loss of the minor's driver's license for one year. If a minor is convicted of driving under the influence, he or she may be fined, incarcerated, have his/her driver's license taken away and be required to enroll in a recognized treatment program and/or be placed on probation.

Graduation is a time for happiness and excitement. Students and families should be entering this day with a sense of pride and accomplishment. I am urging parents, teachers, administrators, law enforcement, business and community leaders in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Assembly District help students celebrate safely and make June a month free of alcohol- or drug-related motor vehicle deaths or injuries. Most importantly, the responsibility lies with our graduating seniors. I am positive every one of our students has a future filled with the promise of success. It is vital that all of our seniors maintain a healthy lifestyle and are able to live to become the leaders of tomorrow.

Congratulations!

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