

Lawmakers reconsider sexting penalties

By Brendan McNally
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

State legislators are currently debating a bill that could stop underage Penn State students and other minors from being charged with a felony for sexting.

Minors caught sending lewd pictures of themselves with their cell phones — popularly known as sexting — can currently be charged with possession or dissemination of child pornography, which could result in a permanent criminal record and registration as a sex offender, said state Rep. Seth Grove, R-York.

However, Grove is sponsoring legislation making sexting a sec-

ond-degree misdemeanor instead of a felony, meaning a conviction would not have the same life-altering impact it has now.

The bill is scheduled for a vote in the House Judiciary Committee today.

Grove said the bill would properly punish minors who sext while still allowing them to move on from their mistake.

"It sends the message that these actions won't be tolerated, we'll charge you with it, but it won't ruin your life," he said.

Grove said the charge of a second-degree misdemeanor is on par with a shoplifting charge, can be expunged from a criminal record and would not prevent minors from receiving scholar-

ships or serving in the military later in life.

Penn State student Alan McBride (junior-telecommunications) thinks the new legislation would take a step in the right direction.

"It's still not a smart thing to do," he said. "But I don't think that [minors] should be punished and labeled a sex offender for just sending one picture of themselves to their significant other."

Grove said there is no definition of sexting in the Pennsylvania criminal code, which means district attorneys have had the freedom to do everything from not charging minors at all to charging them with felonies under child pornography laws.

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Rep. Seth Grove
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What's more, he said, the current law has failed to keep up with changing technology.

"The big problem is that when these child predator laws came out, cell phones didn't have cameras," Grove said. "Technology surpassed the laws we have."

He said the bill has received bipartisan support and expects it will pass the Judiciary Committee.

Rep. Kerry Benninghoff, R-Centre, thinks the legislation is something lawmakers should seriously consider implementing.

"A lot of silly things people do when they're young is not done to be malicious," he said. "Someone shouldn't have to pay the rest of their life for something like that."

To e-mail reporter: bwm5147@psu.edu

Police: DUI arrests above average statewide

By Greg Galiffa
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

New DUI statistics from the State College Police Department have some authorities expecting to break arrest records.

There were 39 Driving Under the Influence (DUI) arrests in the month of January, which is above average, State College Police Department Lt. Dana Leonard said.

"If you were to expand that over the entire year, we would have a record-breaking DUI year," he

said. Leonard said those arrested — including 10 Penn State students — had an average blood alcohol content (BAC) of .183 percent, more than double the legal driving limit of .08 percent. He also said that of the 39 people arrested, 54 percent had BACs more than .16, with the highest at .36.

But the numbers aren't only increasing in State College. DUI arrests are becoming more frequent throughout Pennsylvania, said George Geisler, a Pennsylvania DUI Association Law Enforcement Services offi-

cer. In fact, there were 56,446 DUI arrests in 2008 statewide, he said. In 2007, there were about 53,000. State College's current record is 450 arrests, set several years ago.

Geisler credits the increase of arrests to the amount of training officers receive throughout the state, including the national program Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement (ARIDE), which is designed to prepare officers to handle DUI arrests in a more effective manner. The increase in arrests has been noticed by local organi-

zations in the region as well.

"It's surprising that the numbers are getting higher," said Evelyn McKee, community action team leader for Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). "I've seen it happening over the past few years."

McKee, who works at the Centre-Clinton chapter of MADD, said she is constantly speaking with first-time DUI offenders in an attempt to stop future incidents. She also visits schools and prisons to educate about the dangerous effects of driving drunk.

For Leonard and the local police, spreading education means publicizing more of these numbers and discouraging any potential drunken drivers from getting behind the wheel.

"We have an enormous amount of people out there driving drunk," he said. "They need to find an alternative. If we advertise how many people are getting arrested, it would only create a deterrent for those who choose to drink and drive."

To e-mail reporter: gmg5041@psu.edu

Program offers alternative options for diabetics

By Erica L. Brecher
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

764,000 Pennsylvania adults with diabetes have a new option for managing their disease through a new Penn State program.

"Dining with Diabetes: A Program for Adults with Diabetes and their Families," was brought to the state last year through the Penn State Cooperative Extension, an educational network that gives Pennsylvanians access to Penn State's resources and expertise.

A four-week program that seeks to teach adults how to cook and select foods to better manage the

disease, Dining with Diabetes is offered in 30 counties so far, director Jill Cox said.

Three months after the program's completion, participants have a check-up to track their health. Cox said check-ups have shown a drop in blood pressure, waist circumference and healthier blood sugar levels, which builds participants' self-esteem.

"Many people with diabetes feel completely overwhelmed by the disease, so depression and diabetes often goes hand in hand," Cox said. "But we've seen an increase in self confidence about managing the disease, and they feel better about themselves."

Mary Ehret, a registered dieti-

cian who leads the program in Luzerne County, said a lot of participants didn't know the basics of food selection for people with diabetes. She teaches them to make better choices based on food labels, fiber content, heart-healthy oils and carbohydrates.

She also offers recipe tasting, featuring foods made without salt or with artificial sweeteners.

"They're really appreciative of getting to test diabetes-friendly recipes. It makes a difference," Ehret said. "Two people have told me they've taken salt shakers off their tables, and another person told me he's going to bake a cake with whole-grain flour."

Dining with Diabetes originated

at West Virginia University about a decade ago. Since then, it has been offered in many states through funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and state departments of health, said Cox.

The program was first offered in Pennsylvania last March as a pilot program and only included eight counties. Twenty-two more counties have joined since then.

Researchers looked at hospitalization and amputation statistics to determine which counties needed the program the most, also taking a look at kidney disease and deaths related to diabetes. Demographics including education level and unemploy-

BY THE NUMBERS

230 million

24 million

764,000

ment were also considered. "It's in its early stages since many counties are just starting their programs, but the potential is great," Cox said.

To e-mail reporter: elb5136@psu.edu

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