

“Sober Vibes” Essay Contest

Contest Information

The Keeping It Safe Coalition (KIS), an independent coalition that focuses on deterring under-21 alcohol use, is hosting an essay contest for high school juniors and seniors in Montgomery County public schools, private schools, and home school programs. Students will compose an essay in the form of a persuasive letter addressed to their peers making a promise not to consume alcohol before, during, or after prom. Entries will be judged according to the criteria below. The winning entries will receive a limousine ride to and from prom for themselves and up to 9 guests. Essays will be published on our coalition webpage and sent out with a press release. Winners will be recognized during the Keeping It Safe Awards in May 2026.

How to Enter

Essays must be submitted online no later than March 31, 2026, by 11:59PM. To submit an entry, visit the [submission link](#). All entries will be reviewed in early April. Winners will be notified via email and/or phone. All entries must have a parent and/or guardian as a point of contact.

Prize

Two (2) winners will be selected via a review of their essays conducted by the KIS Coalition members. Winners will receive a limousine ride from the hours of 5PM to 12AM. The limousine will pick up the student winner and up to 9 of their friends from an agreed upon location. The location must be sent at least five (5) days prior to prom night. All guests must be ready for pick up at 5PM. If additional stops must be made (e.g. restaurants), this information will be required when organizing pick-up.

Essay Criteria

To enter, students must submit an essay in the form of a letter (500 words) addressed to their peers that aims to persuade their peers to not consume alcohol before, during, or after prom. This can include but are not limited to: the dangers of alcohol consumption among youth under-21, dealing with peer pressure, and finding alternative coping mechanisms.

Entries that utilize AI will be disqualified. Each entry will be judged by the following criteria:

- Content & understanding of under-21 alcohol consumption. Scored on:
 - Accuracy of information (statistics)
 - Relevance to prom night
 - Originality
- Proposed solution. Scored on:
 - Target audience
 - Comprehensiveness
- Creativity. Scored on:
 - Original approach
 - Grammar
 - Perspicuity (clarity)
- Call to action. Scored on:
 - Motivation to appeal
 - Personal conviction

Each category will be scored based on the following rubric:

- 4 – Excellent: Demonstrates exceptional understanding, innovation, practical, and impeccably presented.
- 3 – Good: Solid understanding, creative elements, practical, well-presented with minor flaws
- 2 – Fair: Basic understanding, some creative attempts, limited practicality, several presentation issues
- 1 – Poor: Lacks understanding, unoriginal, AI generated, impractical, poorly presented

Questions

All questions for the contest must be submitted to Roddy Aguirre at rodrigo.aguirre@montgomerycountymd.gov