



## Holiday Parties Can Put Host Companies at Risk

News

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Michelli Rivera was quoted on *11 Alive* on December 14, 2015. The article "Holiday Parties Can Put Host Companies at Risk" discussed how employers need to be aware of the legal risks they can face if they provide alcohol to a company holiday party, and that's not all.

"Liability is a real concern for employers who know that company holiday parties can be the precipice of harassment and discrimination claims," said Michelli. "In addition, in many states with host liquor liability laws, employers can face liability associated with allowing intoxicated employees to drive home."

Michelli said in Georgia, anyone who knowingly sells, furnishes or serves alcohol to another person who is noticeably drunk can be held liable for any injuries or damages caused by that intoxicated person.

"This law remains applicable where the provider is an employer," added Michelli, represents clients in all areas of labor and employment law, including employment discrimination claims, wrongful termination claims, training, and prevention.

To avoid any kind of legal trouble, Michelli suggested the following steps for company party-planning:

- Throw the party on a weekday so employees are less likely to indulge.
- Keep decorations religion-neutral and don't ask employees to participate in caroling to avoid claims of religious discrimination.
- In your party communication, clearly state that employees need to act responsibly. "It may also behoove you to drop a note about your non-discrimination and non-harassment policies so that employees understand that inappropriate jokes and vulgar comments are not invited," Michelli said.
- Remind supervisors that they need to set an example and not be "one of the group."
- Invite senior management and spouses to the party. "Spouses can help quell inappropriate behavior," she explained.
- Designate a watchdog to help identify and correct troublesome behavior.

- Staff the party with professional bartenders who are trained to cut off intoxicated employees and help avoid liability.
- Make sure you have a water station set up.
- Limit the length of the party, and close the bar an hour early. "But keep the music going," she said.
- Assign someone to be the gatekeeper to look for signs of intoxication as employees leave the party. Ask them to coordinate rides through Uber, Lyft or a taxi service.
- Do not have mistletoe, and do not allow supervisors or managers to host after-parties.

"What happens at the holiday office party does not stay at the holiday office party," Michelli added.

To read the full article, please visit [11 Alive](#).

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