

**Statement of Senator Christopher J. Dodd  
Upon Introduction of  
The STOP (Sober Truth On Preventing) Underage Drinking Act  
February 16, 2005**

MR. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today with my colleague, Senator Mike DeWine, to reintroduce legislation designed to prevent our nation's children and youth from succumbing to the dangers associated with underage alcohol use. The legislation that we introduce today, the STOP (Sober Truth On Preventing) Underage Drinking Act, will greatly strengthen our nation's ability to combat the too often deadly consequences associated with underage drinking.

An initial examination, Mr. President, of the problems presented by underage drinking is truly alarming. Alcohol is the most commonly used drug among America's youth. More young people drink alcohol than smoke tobacco or use marijuana combined. In 2002, 20 percent of eighth graders had drunk alcohol in the previous 30 days. Forty-nine percent of high school seniors are drinkers, and 29 percent report having had five or more drinks in a row, or binged in the past two weeks.

Tragically, we know that this year underage drinking will directly lead to more than 3,500 deaths, more than two million injuries, 1,200 babies born with fetal alcohol syndrome and more than 50,000 youths treated for alcohol dependence. We also know that the social costs associated with underage drinking total close to \$53 billion annually, including \$19 billion from automobile accidents and \$29 billion from associated violent crime.

And while no one can argue with the tragic loss of life and significant financial costs associated with underage drinking, too few of us think of the equally devastating loss of potential that occurs when our children begin to drink. Research indicates that children who begin drinking do so at only 12 years of age. We also know that children that begin drinking at such an early age develop a predisposition for alcohol dependence later in life. Such early experimentation can have devastating consequences and derail a child's potential just as she or he is starting out on the path to adulthood. The consumption of alcohol by our children can literally rob them of their future.

Mr. President, the truly alarming and devastating effects of underage alcohol use are what initially led Senator DeWine and I to begin work to address this important issue. Since that time we have worked extensively with Representatives Roybal-Allard, Wolf, DeLauro, Osbourne and Wamp to craft the broad legislative initiative that we introduce today.

The STOP Underage Drinking Act creates the framework for a multifaceted, comprehensive national campaign to prevent underage drinking. Specifically, the legislation includes four major areas of policy development. First, the STOP Underage Drinking Act authorizes \$2 million to establish an Interagency Coordinating Committee to coordinate all federal agency efforts and expertise designed to prevent underage drinking. Chaired by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, this committee will be required to report to the Congress on an annual basis the extent to which federal efforts are addressing the urgent need to curb underage drinking.

Mr. President, I am particularly pleased that one of the many items in this annual report to

Congress will provide for the public health monitoring of the amount of alcohol advertising reaching our children. I have become increasingly concerned about the degree to which alcohol advertisements appear to target our nation's children. It is my hope that the monitoring called for by this legislation will expose any unethical advertising practices that reach children. We must do all that we can to ensure that our children are not exposed to harmful and deceptive alcohol promotions.

In addition to the federal coordination of federal underage drinking prevention efforts, the STOP Underage Drinking Act additionally authorizes \$1 million to fund an adult-oriented National Media Campaign against Underage Drinking. Mr. President, research indicates that most children who drink obtain the alcohol from their parents or from other adults. The National Media Campaign against underage drinking will specifically seek to educate those who provide our children with alcohol about the dangers inherent in underage alcohol use. This media campaign will build upon the valuable underage drinking prevention efforts already underway by the Ad Council, whose campaigns average an estimated \$28 million in donated media from media outlets nationwide.

The legislation additionally authorizes \$10 million to provide states, not-for-profit groups and institutions of higher education the ability to create statewide coalitions to prevent underage drinking and alcohol abuse by college and university students. This section will also provide alcohol-specific enhancement grants through the Drug Free Communities program.

Lastly, Mr. President, the STOP Underage Drinking Act authorizes \$6 million to expand research to assess the health effects of underage drinking on adolescent development, including its effect on the brain. This effort will additionally increase federal data collection on underage drinking, including reporting on the types and brands of alcohol that kids consume.

I want to convey my belief that this legislation truly offers a historical, first step toward addressing the national tragedy represented by underage drinking. I pledge to work strenuously toward passing the STOP Underage Drinking Act and building on its strong foundation and I ask for the support of my colleagues for this critically important initiative.