

# **Support the Sober Truth on Preventing Underage Drinking (STOP) Act**

## **H.R. 864/S. 408**

### **TALKING POINTS**

- Underage drinking is a public health and safety problem of major proportions for young people and society, and a severe burden on the U.S. economy. The consequences are estimated to cost our nation more than \$58 billion per year. (1)
- According to the Centers for Disease Control, alcohol is a key factor in the four leading causes of death among young people in America: traffic crashes, homicides, injuries, and suicides. (2)
- Research suggests that underage drinking accounts for up to 20 percent of all alcohol consumption in the United States. (3)
- Alcohol affects adolescents differently than adults. Exposure of the developing brain to alcohol may have long-lasting effects on intellectual capabilities and may increase the likelihood of alcohol addiction. (4)
- The average American child tries alcohol before the age of 13. Youth who drink before they turn 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who start drinking at 21. (5) The earlier children drink, the more likely they are to be the victims or perpetrators of violence, to drive drunk or ride with a drinking driver, to drop out of school, to have unplanned and/or unprotected sex and to sustain alcohol related injuries. (6)
- Underage drinking spawns the future heavy and addicted drinking on which the alcoholic-beverage market depends: the top 20 percent of beer drinkers account for 80 percent of beer consumption. The vast majority of drinkers, who consume alcohol minimally, only account for 20 percent of the market. (7)
- According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), prevention efforts are beginning to pay off in declining rates of teen smoking and street drug use. However, in the absence of comparable efforts to combat underage drinking, alcohol use and binge drinking among teens continue at alarmingly high rates. DHHS data for 2003 show that about 10.9 million persons aged 12 to 20 reported drinking alcohol in the past month (about 30 percent of this age group). Nearly 7.2 million (19.2 percent) were binge drinkers, and 2.3 million (6.1 percent) were heavy drinkers. (8)
- Underage youth are 60 times more likely to see a commercial promoting an alcoholic beverage than they are to see an industry-funded "responsibility" ad. (9)

- A 2001 report by the General Accounting Office of the U.S. Congress (Underage Drinking: Information on Federal Funds Targeted at Prevention) found that only \$71 million of the federal government's fiscal year 2000 budget was allocated specifically to the prevention of underage drinking. This minimal allocation pales in comparison with the \$18 billion our government spends on the drug war, the \$58 billion in estimated annual costs of underage drinking, and the more than \$3 billion alcohol producers spend per year on alcohol advertising and promotion. Moreover, this small allocation is scattered among disparate federal agencies and multiple programs, developed with little coordination among the agencies and no unifying vision or strategy.

## References

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