



LEGISLATION ACTION ALERT

DATE: February 14, 2007

Advocacy Alert: “Alcopops” & Underage Drinking

Alcohol is the most commonly used drug among our Nation’s young people, surpassing tobacco and illicit drugs. Underage drinking is a leading public health problem in this country. Each year, approximately 5,000 young people under the age of 21 die as a result of alcohol consumption: 1,900 deaths from automobile accidents, 1,600 from homicides, 300 from suicide as well as hundreds from other injuries such as falls, burns and drowning. Results of national surveys suggest that 75% of 12th graders, 66% of 10th graders and approximately 40% of 8th graders have consumed alcohol. In addition, 11% of 8th graders, 22% of 10th graders and 29% of 12th graders had engaged in heavy or binge drinking within the past two weeks.

“Alcopop” is a term coined by the popular media to describe bottled alcoholic beverages that resemble sweet drinks such as soda and lemonade. Alcopop products have an alcohol content slightly higher than beer, with the appearance and taste more like a low alcohol mixed drink or soft drink. Examples include Smirnoff Ice, Mike’s Hard Lemonade, Bacardi Silver and Hard Cola. The widespread use of Alcopops by youth has been well documented. A 2005 study found that 56% of high school seniors reported using Alcopops in 2004. Research also shows that girls are more likely to consume Alcopops than boys. Teen girls reported drinking Alcopops more than any other alcoholic beverage.

Taxes and availability are two of the factors influencing whether youth have access to alcoholic beverages. Alcopops are currently taxed at the same rate as beer rather than at the higher level for distilled spirits. Groups advocating to reduce underage drinking believe that, as Alcopops contained distilled spirits, they should be taxed as such. They believe that, increasing the rate of taxation for these beverages will increase the costs associated with them, leading to a reduction in consumption by minors.

The Board of Equalization (BOE), at a public hearing in Sacramento on Feb. 22nd, is hearing this issue. California State PTA has submitted a letter of support to efforts to reclassify Alcopops as distilled spirits and adjust the rate of taxation accordingly. Individual PTA members as well as units, councils and districts are encouraged to

consider this issue and send letters to the BOE (upon approval of their membership) prior to Feb. 22nd, A sample letter is included below.

For more information on this topic, see:

“Alcopops” & California Youth: A Conversation with Middle & High School Students”, Center for Applied Research Solutions. March 10, 2006. www.cars-rp.org/alcopops_summary_report.pdf

“Girlie Drinks...women’s diseases: Teenage Drinking Survey Results” American Medical Association. www.alcoholpolicymd.com/pdf/girlie_drinks_survey%20.pdf

“Preventing Adolescent Binge Drinking: Alcopops & Youth” Center for Applied Research Solutions. www.youthbingedrink.org/facts/p_alcopops.php
BOE Hearings on Special Taxes for Flavored Malt Beverages.
www.boe.ca.gov/sptaxprog/alcoholicbeverage.htm

You may also wish to consult figures for underage drinking in your own communities by asking your School or School District for results of the recent “Healthy Kids Survey”.

Sample Letter:

Mr. Robert Lambert
Assistant Chief Counsel
Board of Equalization
Legal Department-MIC: 83
Office of the Chief Counsel
450 N. Street, P.O. Box 94287
Sacramento, CA 94379-0001

Dear Mr. Lambert:

RE: Classification of Flavored Malt Beverages (“Alcopops”).

On behalf of the XX PTA with over XX members in XX, I urge the support of the Board of Equalization to amend its regulations regarding the classification of Flavored Malt Beverages, also known as “Alcopops”, to classify them as distilled spirits.

PTA has serious concerns about the prevalence of teen drinking and its impact on the health and well being of our young people. This is a serious public health concern with impacts on alcohol-related youth violence, traffic accidents, and other injuries. “Alcopops” are particularly appealing to youth primarily because they look and taste almost identical to soda pop or lemonade. A recent survey of youth in California supported national findings regarding “Alcopops” consumption among underage drinkers. The Center for Applied Research Solutions conducted a survey and found that youth are attracted to the colorful, hip packaging, that they underestimate the alcoholic content and that these drinks are, in fact, very popular with California teens.

We believe the widespread availability and low cost of these beverages is a key factor in influencing the level of underage drinking. Classifying "Alcopops" as distilled spirits, rather than as beer, will help keep these beverages out of the hands of California's youth. Therefore, the decision rendered by the BOE will have serious implications for combating underage drinking.

On behalf of the California State PTA, I respectfully urge the BOE to classify "Alcopops" as distilled spirits to safeguard the health and well being of California's youth.

Sincerely,

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