



SADD Press Release:

Parental Involvement & Outreach are Keys to Preventing Underage Drinking, Witnesses Tell Congress

NEWS from the Committee on Education and the Workforce
John Boehner, Chairman

February 11, 2004

Parental Involvement & Outreach are Keys to Preventing Underage Drinking, Witnesses Tell Congress

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Testifying today before the U.S. House Education Reform Subcommittee, witnesses representing both industry and community groups told members of Congress that early intervention, effective communication, and parental involvement are essential to fighting the problem of underage drinking. The witnesses agreed that while the prevalence of middle and high school aged alcohol consumption has been significantly reduced, more work is needed to continue to address the problem.

"Significant gains have been made in reducing underage drinking since the 1970s and 1980s. I applaud the various local, state, and federal governmental organizations, the public health community groups, and the members of industry that have contributed to this reduction," said Education Reform Subcommittee Chairman Mike Castle (R-DE). "However, this issue remains a real problem with very real and devastating consequences."

The witnesses, who represented a broad collection of industry and community groups leading the fight against underage drinking, all emphasized the central role parents play in prevention and the need for a continued commitment to prevention efforts.

"We believe the best way to continue the progress made in the fight against underage drinking is through education, especially involving parents. Over the last 22 years, Anheuser-Busch and its family of wholesalers have invested nearly half a billion dollars in these efforts and are committed to being part of the solution," said Francine Katz, vice president of corporate communications for Anheuser-Busch.

Wendy Hamilton, national president of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, said parents and students do not know enough about the dangers of underage drinking. "The need for a comprehensive public education campaign aimed at underage drinking prevention is undeniable as most parents and teens are unaware of the dangers associated with underage alcohol use," said Hamilton.

While all the witnesses noted the positive trend of a reduction in underage alcohol consumption, the panel did agree underage drinking remains a problem. Robert Newton, a certified alcohol drug counselor with the Betty Ford Center, explained, "Underage drinking is a serious widespread problem in America that deserves immediate Congressional action. Approximately 10.7 million underage Americans, 28.8% of the 12 to 20 age group, reported drinking alcohol in the month prior to being surveyed by the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health and 7.2 million of those teens are classified as binge drinkers."



SADD Press Release:

Parental Involvement & Outreach are Keys to Preventing Underage Drinking, Witnesses Tell Congress

Among the solutions discussed by witnesses, many cited effective communication and intervention as an important strategy. Jacqueline Hackett, a high school senior from Montgomery County Pennsylvania and a member of the Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) Student Leadership Council's executive committee, explained the role her organization plays in alcohol and drug abuse prevention.

"SADD chapters provide information and education about the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol, but they also host alternative drug-free activities for students, mentor younger elementary and middle school students and reach out to other groups in the community such as law enforcement, the media and the business community," Hackett said. "SADD chapters offer a 'safe-haven' for those who have made the conscientious decision not to use. SADD students become alternative role models and continuously work to bring people together who believe in the 'no use' message for youth and want to make a positive difference in their community."

"Underage drinking is an issue where we must work together," said former Congresswoman Susan Molinari, chairman of the Century Council. "Important progress has been made in reducing underage drinking over the past few decades. The implementation of effective programs has resulted in fewer alcohol-related deaths and injuries among youth but more can be done."

Each of the witnesses offered constructive statements to increase awareness of the scope of the underage drinking problem and to advance a more focused national strategy to address this serious public health issue.

Underage drinking is a serious and complex issue that is frequently discounted as a "right of passage," according to hearing participants. This basic lack of awareness among adults is a problem in and of itself, committee members noted. Committee members expressed support for ongoing efforts to reinforce and encourage existing public and private outreach efforts to parents and other adults, which are critical elements of a more comprehensive education and awareness strategy to address underage drinking.

#####