



PUBLIC POLICY & INFORMATION

Promoting Addiction Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Through Advocacy and Education

POSITION PAPER **No. 4/214th Legislature** **(2010-2011)**

ISSUE:

Requires keg registration; makes the unlawful possession of an unregistered keg a petty disorderly persons offense.

BILL NO.

S-1658 (Turner)

NCADD-NJ POSITION:

NCADD—NJ strongly supports S-1658 as an effective tool to prevent underage drinking in the state. Underage drinking in the United States, including New Jersey, is a pervasive and critical public health problem. Underage drinking accounts for 20 percent of all alcohol consumed in the country (\$23.2 billion of the total \$116.2 billion Americans spend on alcohol each year).

Beer kegs are often the main source of alcohol at youth parties. When law enforcement officers arrive at these parties, people quickly disperse, and the police have no way of knowing who purchased an untagged keg. Beer keg registration laws require retailers to place an identifying tag on each beer keg sold and to obtain information on the purchaser's identity. This allows police to identify the purchaser of any keg used to provide beer to underage drinkers.

A statewide keg registration policy in New Jersey is consistent with NCADD—NJ's belief that individuals must be held reasonably accountable for their behavior. People who are 21 or older who illegally provide alcohol to youth must be held responsible through legal and/or financial consequences for their actions. Keg registration encourages adults to consider the consequences

of buying kegs of beer and allowing youth to drink from them.

Keg registration laws have been enacted in the District of Columbia and in 27 states, including Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont and Virginia on the east coast. Although requirements for keg registration could be implemented by local ordinance, NCADD—NJ recommends the enactment of a statewide law to prevent purchasers from driving to a nearby town where keg registration has not been implemented.

No other drug threatens as many of the nation's youth to the degree alcohol does. Many young people do not realize that consuming too much alcohol can be fatal. It is implicated in the four top causes of teen deaths: accidents, unintentional injuries, homicide, and suicide. Underage drinking costs Americans nearly \$53 billion annually, including more than \$29 billion stemming from alcohol-related violent crime, more than \$19 billion from traffic crashes, and more than \$1.5 billion from suicide attempts. The effects on young drinkers can be devastating when the physical effects of alcohol are coupled with emotional immaturity and inexperience. Alcohol alters and kills brain cells and can adversely affect an individual's ability to form new memories. Some intoxicated youth injure or kill themselves in tragedies that could have been avoided if they were sober.

Young people who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol abuse or dependence than those who don't drink until the legal age of 21. Thus, preventing young people from drinking may not only save them from harm in their youth, it may prevent a lifetime of alcohol-related problems.

Despite these deeply troubling consequences, alcohol continues to be New Jersey youth's number



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one drug of choice, with 39 percent of New Jersey 7th and 8th graders and 79 percent of 9th through 12th graders having used alcohol at some point; 46 percent having drunk at least once in the previous 30 days and 27 percent having engaged in binge drinking. Among the reasons for these high numbers was the ease with which young people can obtain alcohol.

As an advocate for the prevention and treatment of alcoholism and other drug addiction, NCADD—NJ is firmly committed to reducing underage drinking and its devastating consequences. While a statewide keg registration law will not in itself solve the problem of underage drinking, NCADD—NJ believes it is an important measure that will enhance and supplement existing underage drinking prevention strategies in the New Jersey.

Footnotes

i) Grunbaum, J., Kann, L., Kinchen, S.A., Williams, B.I., Ross, J.G. Lowry, & Kolbe, L.J. Youth risk behavior surveillance--United States, 2001. In: Surveillance Summaries, June 28, 2002. MMWR 2002;51(No. SS-4):1-64.

ii) Levy, D.T., Miller, T.R., Spicer, R. & Stewart, K. (1999). Underage Drinking: Intermediate Consequences and their Costs. Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation working paper. June 1999.

iii) Grant, B.F. & Dawson, D.A. (1997). Age at Onset of Alcohol Use and its Association with DSM-IV Alcohol Abuse and Dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse*. 9:103-110.

v) New Jersey Student Health Survey of High School Students N.J. Dept. of Education, Division of Student Services, 2005.

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