

The STOP Underage Drinking Act

Summary The “Sober Truth on Preventing Underage Drinking Act,” or “STOP Underage Drinking Act,” was introduced on July 21st by a bipartisan group of U.S. senators and representatives. The bill recognizes that “a multifaceted effort is needed to more successfully address underage drinking in the United States.” The key to making progress against underage drinking is a coordinated approach to prevention, intervention, treatment, and research.

Analysis The STOP Underage Drinking Act employs many of the well-tested policies and programs recommended in the Institute of Medicine’s September 2003 report to Congress. It funds measures that will reduce alcohol’s availability to teens, better enforce drinking laws, and provide more resources for local community efforts. It also funds a small pilot that could serve as a model for a national adult-oriented media campaign to educate parents about this issue. It provides for the public health monitoring of the amount of alcohol advertising reaching our youth.

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Interagency Coordinating Committee

The bill provides \$2 million for a committee of federal agencies focused on underage drinking. Chaired by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the committee is charged with guiding policy and program development across the federal government with respect to underage drinking. The committee will also produce two reports – an annual report to Congress on progress at the federal level and a report card to evaluate efforts at the state level.

The annual report to Congress will summarize:

- 1) All programs and policies of federal agencies designed to prevent underage drinking.
- 2) The extent of progress in reducing underage drinking nationally.
- 3) Patterns and consequences of underage drinking.
- 4) Measures of the availability of alcohol to underage populations and of the exposure of this population to messages regarding alcohol in advertising and entertainment media.
- 5) Findings derived from the additional research on underage drinking called for by the bill, such as brand preferences of underage drinkers and their exposure to alcohol advertising.
- 6) Evidence-based best practices to both prevent underage drinking and provide treatment services to those youth who need them.

- 7) Such other information regarding underage drinking as the Secretary determines to be appropriate.

The annual “report card” will rate the performance of each state in enacting and enforcing laws, regulations, and programs to prevent and reduce underage drinking. The committee, in consultation with public health, consumer, and alcoholic beverage industry groups, will create measures to evaluate the states’ progress in adopting and implementing programs that can reduce underage drinking such as strict enforcement of minimum drinking age laws, compliance checks of alcohol retail outlets, levels of investment of State funds in underage drinking prevention and other programs.

National media campaign to prevent underage drinking

The bill provides the Secretary of Health and Human Services with funding to continue to fund and oversee the production, broadcasting, and evaluation of the Ad Council’s adult-oriented public service media campaign. The bill provides \$1 million for each of the fiscal years 2005 and 2006. It also requires the Secretary to provide an annual report to Congress detailing the progress and effectiveness of the campaign as well as the feasibility and likeliness of a youth-focused media campaign to combat underage drinking.

Community-based coalition enhancement grants to prevent underage drinking and grants directed at reducing higher-education alcohol abuse

The act provides \$5 million in FY 2005 for the award of “enhancement grants” of up to \$50,000 for organizations to design, test, evaluate and disseminate strategies to maximize the effectiveness of community-wide approaches to underage drinking.

The act also provides \$5 million in FY 2005 for the Secretary of Education to award grants to enable eligible entities to reduce the rate of underage alcohol use, binge drinking, and drug use among college and university students.

Additional research on underage drinking

The act provides \$6 million to the Secretary of Health and Human Services to collect data on, and conduct or support research on, underage drinking with respect to the following:

- 1) The short and long-range impact of alcohol use and abuse upon adolescent brain development.
- 2) Community-based strategies to prevent underage drinking.
- 3) Improved knowledge of the scope of the underage drinking problem and progress in preventing and treating underage drinking.
- 4) More precise information than is currently collected on the type and quantity of alcoholic beverages consumed by underage drinkers as well as information on brand preferences of these drinkers and their exposure to alcohol advertising.

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