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Statement of CSPI Alcohol Policies Project Director George A. Hacker on Introduction of STOP Underage Drinking Act

WASHINGTON—Alcohol is the leading drug problem among young people in the United States and underage drinking contributes to the deaths of 6.5 times more young people than all illicit drugs combined. The “STOP Underage Drinking Act” represents a long-overdue acknowledgement of the need to begin addressing the many harms related to underage drinking. We applaud the hard work of the sponsors, Senators DeWine and Dodd and Representatives Roybal-Allard, Wolf, Wamp, DeLauro, and Osborne, who have stimulated a necessary conversation on the federal responsibility to do more to protect young lives.

This bill lays the groundwork for the eventual implementation of many of the recommendations of the Institute of Medicine’s September 2003 report to Congress. That report proposed an adult-oriented national media campaign as the “centerpiece” of a comprehensive national strategy to combat underage drinking. This legislation moves that idea one small step forward.

The bill also modestly funds vital community and campus initiatives, monitoring of alcohol advertising, and important research. It provides for improved governmental coordination and reporting. We eagerly await future opportunities to work with the sponsors and other members of Congress to implement those programs and develop a substantially expanded national media campaign.

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The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) is a nonprofit health research and education group based in Washington, D.C., that focuses on nutrition, food safety, and pro-health alcohol policies. CSPI is supported largely by the 850,000 U.S. and Canadian subscribers to its Nutrition Action Healthletter and by foundation grants.