

CONTACT: Kurt Gregory Erickson
President

PHONE: W. 703/893-0461
CELL. 703/625-2303

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TEEN DRINKING BILLS ADVANCE IN VIRGINIA

BILLS ALLOWING COURTS TO CRACK-DOWN ON UNDERAGE DRINKING AMONGST THOSE MOVING FORWARD IN RICHMOND

Richmond, VA, Mar. 9 – With recent U.S. data showing underage drinking on the rise and Virginia data showing a virtual stalling in the numbers of teens using alcohol, a number of anti-teen drinking bills are advancing to Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell's (R) desk for his signature into law.

Bills moving forward in this year's Virginia General Assembly session --which is scheduled to conclude its business this Saturday -- include those proposing to:

- **eliminate the current mandate that persons under 18 convicted of underage drinking automatically have their disposition deferred (HB 862...PASSED HOUSE & SENATE UNANIMOUSLY; CURRENTLY BACK BEFORE HOUSE FOR APPROVAL OF SENATE SUBSTITUTE);**
- **allow courts to suspend both the motor vehicle and driver's license or impose a driving curfew for persons under 18 twice convicted of underage drinking (HB 908...PASSED HOUSE & SENATE UNANIMOUSLY; CURRENTLY BACK BEFORE HOUSE FOR APPROVAL OF SENATE AMENDMENT);**
- **disallow courts from issuing restricted driver's licenses for school travel to persons under 18 convicted of either DUI or refusing a BAC test (HB 863...EN ROUTE TO GOVERNOR);**

and **limit where alcohol legally served to those underage (families within a residence) is consumed (TO such residence) (HB 1293...EN ROUTE TO GOVERNOR).**

(more)

“This year’s advancing underage drinking legislation in Richmond is an apt response that alcohol continues to be the most commonly used substance by Virginia teens and that nearly eleven-percent of those killed in the Commonwealth’s drunk driving crashes are 15 to 19-year-olds,” said Kurt Gregory Erickson, President of the nonprofit and Virginia-based Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP), registered Virginia lobbyist and proponent of this year’s underage drinking bills.

Last week, the U.S. Partnership for a Drug-Free America released the findings of its 2009 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study showing alcohol use amongst American high school students increasing by 11-percent since 2008. In addition and according to Virginia’s Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services’ last released and statewide Virginia Community Youth Survey (2005), alcohol use amongst the Commonwealth’s youth has remain unchanged for the report’s last half-decade (2000 – 2005).

In addition to this year’s advancing underage drinking-specific legislation, other related Virginia bills moving forward this year include those proposing both: a new Class 1 misdemeanor penalty for school bus operators consuming or possessing alcohol (**HB 1353**); and the mandating of seatbelt use by persons under 18 in the rear seats of vehicles (as is currently required of persons under 16) (**SB 219**). Both of these measures are also en route to Governor McDonnell and for his consideration of signing into Virginia law.

Founded in 1982, the non-profit and McLean, Virginia-based Washington Regional Alcohol Program is a two-time winner of Virginia’s prestigious Governor’s Transportation Safety Award as well project manager of the Commonwealth’s statewide *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign. As a public-private partnership, WRAP works to prevent drunk driving and underage drinking in the Washington-metropolitan area including in Northern Virginia however the organization may best be known to area residents via its popular free cab ride service for would-be drunk drivers, *SoberRide*.

For more information, visit WRAP’s web site at **www.wrap.org**.

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