

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

My name is Sara Swank and I am here today on behalf of Missouri's Youth/Adult Alliance, the only statewide organization whose sole mission is to reduce underage drinking. Our volunteer coalition includes representation from a variety of backgrounds: youth, prevention professionals, state government, law enforcement, community leaders, parents and educators. Our strategies include: educating communities and identifying social and environmental norms within a community that encourage underage drinking. We offer educational trainings, tools and information to effectively prevent underage drinking in Missouri communities using the most current prevention methods available.

The 2006 Missouri Student School Survey, which is the most current, prepared by the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, cites alcohol as the substance most used by youth. The same survey notes that youth perceive alcohol to be the least harmful drug and feel that their parents thought alcohol use was less wrong than cigarette or marijuana use.

The prefrontal cortex is the area of the brain responsible for judgment, impulse control, problem solving and planning. This area of the brain is not yet fully developed until early adulthood or about age 25. Drinking alcohol before the brain is fully developed can lead to permanent brain damage, resulting in poor academic performance and lack of the ability to make healthy decisions. Knowing the effect alcohol has on the adolescent brain, it is surprising that Missouri students report 12 as the age of their first full drink.

The science and research indicate that alcohol continues to be a major health concern for our youth, because alcohol use contributes to illicit drug use, car crashes, addiction, hospital admissions and other risky behaviors. Preventing underage drinking is an essential part of a comprehensive approach to keeping Missouri youth healthy.

The alcohol industry spends around \$4.8 billion per year on promotions for their products, saturating our environment with alcohol messaging. Missouri spends very little to promote an environment where underage drinking is unacceptable.

As we know that there are limited general revenue dollars available. One possible solution is in the proposed legislation to divert new revenue generated by the sale of alcohol into prevention. The fact is, underage drinking in Missouri is a problem. I am asking you today, as a responsible leader to consider the preventable impact this problem has on our youth. I have provided information for your review and would be happy to discuss this with you at any time. Thank you for your time and consideration.