

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jackie Gillan, 202-439-7762 and Judie Stone, 202-408-1711

Parents, health and safety advocates, make Mother's Day plea to Maryland Governor to veto controversial "kiddie booze" bill – Governor O'Malley may sign or veto by Tuesday, May 13 bill signing ceremony.

Baltimore, MD (Friday, May 9, 2008) – A diverse coalition of health, safety, consumer, medical and religious leaders, as well as parents of Maryland teens killed in underage drinking incidents, delivered two Mother's Day letters to Governor Martin O'Malley just days before he may decide to sign or veto SB 745, controversial legislation backed by the alcohol industry that would reclassify "alcopops" or "kiddie booze" as a beer product for low-tax and wide distribution purposes.

The letters thanked the Governor for postponing consideration of the alcopops bill last month when it was scheduled to be signed into law and made an urgent plea for him to give Maryland moms a gift this Mother's Day by vetoing "this ill-advised and dangerous bill in the interest of our children's health and safety."

The parents and health and safety groups said that the Governor should put "the interests of Maryland families before the interests of the alcohol industry," and went on to explain that alcopops are more like distilled spirits than a beer.

The alcohol content in alcopops is masked by sweet, fruity additive flavors, which has led some to refer to them as 'cocktails with training wheels' because it has been shown that teens consume half of alcopops and they are especially popular among girls for binge drinking.

The text of the two letters follows:

PARENTS LETTER

May 9, 2008

The Honorable Martin O'Malley
Office of the Governor
State House
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1925

Dear Governor O'Malley:

As parents who have lost our children as a result of unfortunate tragedies, we are writing on the eve of Mother's Day weekend to ask you, as both Governor and a parent, to veto SB 745, the alcopops legislation.

Our profound and unspeakable loss should never, ever have to be experienced by another parent. You hold the power to stop this dangerous special interest bill.

By vetoing SB 745, you will honor our children who have tragically died as well as help protect millions of Maryland youth from the harmful and deadly consequences of underage drinking.

Research shows that alcohol is the number one drug of choice among teens. More teens die in alcohol-related incidents than by all illicit drugs combined and most alcopops are consumed by those under the legal drinking age, especially teenage girls. Easy access to alcopops contributes to this widespread public health epidemic.

Parents like us don't have high paid lobbyists with insider access to represent our interests in Annapolis. This bill sped through the Maryland Legislature without a thoughtful and thorough examination of its effect on underage drinking.

Yes, Governor O'Malley it was the right decision to delay signing this bill into law and now it is the right decision to veto SB 745.

No, Governor O'Malley, signing this bill into law is neither a tax increase, nor does it simply codify existing state practice. It is time to stand up to the alcohol lobby just as you have stood up to tobacco interests and tell them to stop targeting our children. Their profits and the state's annual \$3 million giveaway to the industry should not be realized at the expense of the lives of our children and the loss of our loved ones.

No, Governor O'Malley, the fact that laws exist in states around the country is not an excuse for you to sign this bill and lead our state in the wrong direction. Although other states have enacted similar legislation as part of a calculated state-by-state strategy on the part of the alcohol industry, several other states, including Maine, New York and California, are reviewing this standard and beginning to reverse it because of its adverse impact on the public health and safety of their communities.

Yes, Governor O'Malley, by vetoing this legislation, you will help Maryland to save both lives and dollars lost to underage drinking. Every day across our nation, far too many teens die in alcohol-related incidents, including crashes, homicides, suicides, drowning and the list goes on.

You and only you hold the power to stop this terrible bill. We do not want another mother or father to suffer as we have and celebrate Mother's Day in such permanent pain. We ask that you help prevent more deaths and injuries by standing up to the alcohol lobby and veto the alcopops legislation now.

It will be the best Mother's Day gift for every parent in our state.

Sincerely,

Neil and Denise Goldberg
Owings Mills, Maryland
Co-Directors, Marc's Promise Foundation for Teenage Driver Responsibility
(parents of Marc Goldberg, age 18, killed as passenger in underage drinking crash in Baltimore County in August 2006)

Jan and Joe Withers
Upper Marlboro, Maryland
(parents of Alisa Withers, age 15, killed as passenger in underage drinking crash in April 1992)

Jeff and Donna Vetter
Joann Gillin
North East, Maryland
(The Vetter's daughter, Jessica, age 20, died in a traffic crash in April 2007)

Cathy L. Ondrish
Westminster, Maryland
(mother of Zachary Ondrish, age 16, killed as passenger in underage drinking crash in September 2005)

Don, Donna, Ashleigh, Kevin and Ryan Beck
Upper Marlboro, Maryland
(family of Amanda Mae Moore)

Zachary and Courtney Beck-Deutsch
Stevensville, Maryland
(family of Amanda Mae Moore)

Charlotte White-Gray
Clinton, Maryland
(parent of Edward Conway Gray, Jr.)

Jerry and Paula Celentano
Glen Burnie, Maryland
(parents of Alisa Celentano)

COALITION LETTER TO GOVERNOR

May 9, 2008

The Honorable Martin O'Malley
Governor
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor O'Malley,

As leaders of national and state health, safety, consumer, medical, and religious organizations and concerned Maryland parents, we welcomed your decision to postpone consideration of SB 745, the alcopops legislation. However, we now urge you to veto this ill-advised and dangerous bill in the interest of our children's health and safety.

As the prom and graduation season quickly approaches, a joyful event often results in an unspeakable tragedy and loss for many Maryland families as a result of underage drinking. Your veto of SB 745 will send a strong and powerful message that this Administration puts the interests of Maryland families before the interests of the alcohol industry.

Underage drinking is a major public health and safety problem in Maryland that contributes to a vast and tragic array of problems impacting our teens, including violence, addiction, suicide, alcohol poisoning, disease, drunk driving, unintended pregnancies, and lost educational and job opportunities.

Our diverse organizations share a common belief that signing SB 745 into law will be an enormous setback to our efforts and those of your Administration to encourage Maryland's youth to follow a healthy, safe and productive life.

Alcopops are not beer. They are far more closely associated with a low alcohol spirits than a beer product. The alcohol content it is masked by sweet, fruity additive flavors, which has led some to refer to these them as "kiddie booze."

Research shows that the consumption of alcopops in Maryland was responsible for 7,500 teen injuries at an economic cost of \$210 million in 2006. Other research has found that nearly one-half of alcopops are consumed by persons under the 21 minimum drinking age, and that the majority of underage alcopops drinkers are girls.

The fact is, alcohol is the number one drug of choice among our youth today and more teens are killed in alcohol-related incidents than by all of the other illicit drugs combined. In 2006, a national survey found that approximately 40 percent of 8th graders, over 61 percent of 10th graders and 73 percent of 12th graders had tried alcohol.

We, the undersigned, join with many concerned parents across the state to urge you to veto SB 745 and stand ready to support your decision in the Maryland Legislature. Just because other states have this law as a result of a coordinated campaign by the alcohol industry is no excuse for signing this bill. Let us work together to make Maryland the leader in the nation on preventing underage drinking. Your veto of SB 745 is the first step.

Sincerely,

Dena Trail
Maryland State Coordinator
Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD)

Dr. Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP
Executive Director
American Public Health Association

Neil and Denise Goldberg
Co-Directors
Marc's Promise Foundation for Teenage Driver Responsibility

Dan Levy, MD
President
American Academy of Pediatrics Maryland Chapter

Caroline Cash
Executive Director, Chesapeake chapter
Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

Tamra White, RN
Past President and Government Affairs Chair
Emergency Nurses Association

Don Schroeder
Bishop's Deputy for Public Policy
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

Jacqueline S. Gillan
Vice President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Charles Hurley
Chief Executive Officer
Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

Lee Hudson
Director
Lutheran Office on Public Policy in Maryland

Joan Claybrook
President
Public Citizen

Richard Alcorta, MD
Maryland Chapter President
American College of Emergency Physicians

Robbi Hartsock, RN, MSN
President
American Trauma Society of Maryland

Nancy Brady
Garrett County Health Department

Larry L. Leitch
President
Maryland Association of County Health Officers
Carroll County Health Officer

Andrew McGuire
Executive Director
Trauma Foundation

Mimi Fleury
Founder
Community of Concern