

September XX, 2011

Chairwoman Barbara Mikulski  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science and Related Agencies  
Room S-128  
The Capitol  
Washington DC 20510

Ranking Member Kay Bailey Hutchison  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science and Related Agencies  
Room S-128  
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Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Ranking Member Hutchison:

We are writing you in support of appropriations for the Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws (EUDL) program, which is funded through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs (OJJDP) at the Department of Justice (DOJ). Support for EUDL is particularly important at this time because the FY 2012 House Appropriations Committee bill for Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies eliminates funding for all DOJ Title V programs including EUDL. We are hopeful that not only will your Subcommittee and the full Senate Appropriations Committee fund the EUDL grant program, but that it will be funded at a level that allows DOJ to assist our nation's youth effectively.

The EUDL program supports and enhances efforts by states and local jurisdictions to prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages to minors and the purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages by minors. (Minors are defined as individuals under 21 years of age.) EUDL provides funds to every state in order to ensure that our nation's youth are protected from the dangers of underage drinking. It is funded through a block grant system, providing \$20.8 million to the states in FY 2011, a decrease of 17 percent from FY 2010.

Though the EUDL program is housed within the DOJ, other agencies recognize its importance in combating underage drinking. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), for instance, just recently held its 2011 Regional Discussion on Preventing Underage Drinking during which it took comments and recommendations from state prevention leaders including EUDL Coordinators. SAMHSA will use the collaboration with EUDL Coordinators to develop a new plan with specific action steps to address underage drinking.

Underage drinking is a major public health and public safety issue. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), approximately 5,000 young people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking; this includes about 1,900 deaths from motor vehicle crashes, 1,600 as a result of homicides, 300 from suicide, as well as hundreds from other injuries such as falls, burns, and drownings. With the help of EUDL funds, however, states can continue to make progress in reducing preventable youth injuries and deaths through the employment of comprehensive environmental strategies to address underage drinking.

Underage drinking also imposes significant costs on the United States. A 2004 report estimated that underage drinking results in \$8.4 billion of healthcare expenditures annually. Additionally, underage drinking is associated with lower levels of educational attainment and earnings over the lifespan, thereby negatively affecting the economic productivity of the country. Given this, addressing underage drinking helps to ensure that the country remains competitive in the global economy. By working to prevent underage drinking by enforcing laws, EUDL effectively lowers the health and economic costs associated with underage drinking while helping to meet the nation's long term goals.

Further, in the Surgeon General's recently released "National Prevention Strategy," the prevention of alcohol abuse figures prominently. The report, compiled by the nation's leading experts in preventive health, recommends that the federal government support state, tribal, local, and territorial implementation and enforcement of alcohol control policies. This is exactly the role that EUDL grant money can play. The report goes on to cite that states with more stringent alcohol control policies tend to have lower levels of binge drinking among adults and college students. Evidence-based policies that decrease excessive alcohol use and related harms include those that prohibit the sale of alcohol to minors and intoxicated persons; reduce days and hours of sale; and limit the number of places that legally sell alcohol. Laws addressing alcohol impaired driving – including 0.08 percent blood alcohol limits, zero tolerance for persons under age 21, and ignition interlock systems (i.e., devices that prevent vehicle operation when blood alcohol concentration is above a specified level) – have cut alcohol-related traffic deaths in half over the past 30 years.

With funds for underage drinking prevention and law enforcement dwindling at the state and local level, supporting EUDL is more important than ever. We are aware of the fiscal restraint on our nation's budget at present, but we know that the health and economic benefits associated with EUDL greatly outweigh its cost. At a time when policymakers are prioritizing programs that are cost-effective and productive, EUDL is a good investment. Healthy children undoubtedly translate into a more productive future for the United States.

We hope that we can count on your support.

Thank you,