

NEWS RELEASE



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National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey launches youth alcohol campaign, endorses booze tax increase

TRENTON ... (April 20, 2004) – The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey at a State House press conference today voiced its support for a Governor’s Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse resolution to increase the state’s tax on alcohol, part of a broad campaign by the council to confront youth alcohol use. Joined by numerous statewide addiction prevention and treatment associations, NCADD-NJ Director of Public Affairs and Policy John Hulick cited the number of alcohol-related incidents involving New Jersey youth that have occurred in the past few months. He said increasing in the alcohol tax, along with other measures, would have a considerable impact on this persistent problem that undermines so many young lives.

“Since the new year,” Hulick said, “NCADD-NJ has assembled a record from New Jersey newspapers containing one account after another of something terrible befalling teenagers – arrest, sexual assault, serious injury, death – in which alcohol was largely if not wholly to blame. We should all be troubled by these incidents, all the more considering that there are measures such as a hike in the booze tax and a keg registration that would reduce alcohol’s influence over our young people.”

Among the lost futures Hulick mentioned were a high school cheerleader who, with a blood alcohol content double the legal limit, fell from a balcony while on vacation in Hawaii, and a 17-year-old boy recently indicted for luring a 13-year-old girl into a house with alcohol and drugs and raping her.

As proposed, the GCADA resolution to increase the alcohol tax would have many benefits, including allocating funds to create a comprehensive underage drinking education and treatment program similar to the youth anti-smoking initiative that cigarette taxes financed, and creating a price barrier to youth alcohol purchases. Another benefit is GGADA’s recommendation that a

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portion of the alcohol tax be dedicated to the Alcohol Enforcement, Rehabilitation and Education Fund (AEREF), which would allow counties to expand their treatment programs as well as to bolster efforts to combat drunken driving.

Hulick noted that New Jersey now has the highest tax on cigarettes in the nation, with the levy increasing by 300 percent in the past three years. Meanwhile, over the past decade the alcohol tax has been flat. If New Jersey were to increase its alcohol tax to place it among the top five states in the country, it would generate almost \$100 million more than the current rate brings in. If it ranked first in the country, the revenue would be \$278 million, about three times the current amount. A survey by the Eagleton Institute shows a majority of New Jersey residents favor an alcohol tax increase in general, with an even higher percentage supporting the increase if the funding were dedicated to prevention and education programs.

Hulick said that the council is well aware of the difficult budget challenges facing the state. “In light of New Jersey’s fiscal challenges,” he said, “we favor legislation such as Senate bill S-485. Although it does not propose an increase in the booze tax, it would introduce annual 5 percent increases in the alcohol tax revenue dedicated to the Alcohol Education, Rehabilitation and Enforcement Fund, plateauing at 50 percent of that revenue.”

NCADD-NJ has dedicated itself for more than 20 years to educating New Jersey’s citizens about alcohol and drug use issues, to advocating on state policies concerning individuals addicted to alcohol or other drugs, and to reducing the stigma that frustrates a public health approach to the disease of addiction.

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