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Middlesex County Substance Abuse Action Council (MSAAC)

General Law Committee

**Re: H.B. No. 5021 An Act Concerning Competitive Alcoholic Liquor Pricing and Hours of Operations for Permittees
Public Hearing, February 28, 2012**

Sen. Doyle, Sen. Leone, Rep. Taborsak and the Honorable Members of the General Law Committee, my name is Lisa Mason and I work at the Middlesex County Substance Abuse Action Council, one of thirteen regional action councils created by legislative mandate, to prevent substance abuse and promote healthy communities.

Communities across CT have created effective coalitions in partnership with law enforcement to prevent the sale of alcohol to minors, enforce existing laws and educate business that sell alcohol. With this work, underage drinking rates have declined, however alcohol continues to be the #1 drug abused by young people.

I am concerned that the bill does not address the negative consequences that will result from increased sales and lower prices of alcohol.

Expanding alcohol sales to convenience stores will require increased enforcement activities by the CT Department of Consumer Protection Liquor Control Division to assess whether these vendors are complying with the law that prohibits sales to underage youth. HB 5021 does not acknowledge the need for increased enforcement activities nor provide funding for additional Liquor Control Division and local law enforcement staffing.

Extending the sale of alcohol to Sundays and specific holidays will increase the number of alcohol related and fatal car crashes. No plans are included in HB 5021 for increased DUI checkpoints to prevent accidents. Nor does it provide first responders and the CT Judicial Branch more resources to deal with an increase in alcohol related car crashes.

Research shows that a significant number of young people who drink are binge drinkers, and binge drinking accelerates the process of addiction, especially in young people. Expanded

access to alcohol results in more binge drinking by young people. Communities already report a lack of treatment services for young people with substance abuse problems.

A cost-effective research-proven strategy to counteract these negative consequences is substance abuse prevention services at the local, regional and state level. Research shows using multiple prevention strategies can change public opinion, individual behavior and encourage community stakeholders to do their part. Proven strategies include media campaigns, education for youth and families, training for community stakeholders to support prevention efforts, enforcing laws, and changing social norms. Investing in prevention saves money and results in healthier outcomes for individuals and communities. Connecticut has the infrastructure and the knowledge to enhance substance abuse prevention coalitions at the local, regional and state level.

I respectfully request that the CT General Assembly study the social and financial costs associated with HB 5021 before it passes this legislation. If the legislation passes, I request safeguards be incorporated, including the expansion of substance abuse prevention programs, to protect CT residents and communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my concerns regarding this proposed legislation.