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MICHELE DEVINE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR THE SOUTHEASTERN REGIONAL  
ACTION COUNCIL

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 5360

Senator Doyle, Representative Taborsak, and distinguished Members of the General Law Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in **support of HB 5360**. My name is Michele Devine and I am the Executive Director for the Southeastern Regional Action Council.

One of the primary functions of the Southeastern Regional Action Council is to educate communities on the newest trends of substance abuse among youth in CT. During the past four years we have spent substantial time addressing the concerns highlighted in raised bill 5360. We are encouraged to see this committee taking the initiative to hold a hearing on this important piece of legislation that will help protect youth from substance abuse and other addicting behavior.

Last year Connecticut took a huge leap in its prevention efforts by passing legislation that will make it illegal to use various synthetic drugs (cannabinoids, bath salts). However, we still have some work to do. SERAC continues to hear the pleas from parents, prevention, treatment professionals, and school administration that these drugs are highly available, addictive, and ruining lives.

Section 1 of HB 5360 will provide the Commissioner of the Dept. of Consumer Protection with the authority to develop regulations that will prohibit the sale of various substances including controlled substances, energy drinks, products containing excessive melatonin and tobacco related products.

In my community, the increased availability of drug paraphernalia in local gas stations and convenience stores has been noticeable over the last few years. Although drug paraphernalia is illegal according to federal law (Controlled Substances Act Section 863), items commonly sold for use with marijuana have been marketed as "tobacco products." Most importantly is the social norm that the availability of drug paraphernalia conveys to our youth. The message that drug use is commonplace and acceptable is clear, strong, and widespread in our communities. CT has benefited from the great success with tobacco prevention through policies to restrict use, regulate marketing and displays, however, these items have fallen through the loophole.

In addition to the tobacco products and synthetic substances sold at convenience stores and marketed to children, energy drinks have become increasingly popular. Energy drinks are a \$10 billion dollar industry that targets our youth and shift workers. The Food and Drug Administration does not monitor these drinks. They are filled with natural supplements that

may, in small doses, be acceptable but not the way they are being marketed to our young children. Did you know that one can of Monster has the amount of caffeine as 5 cans of coke? Young children are not prepared to deal with caffeine in this amount. They do not have the knowledge to understand that the headache, upset stomach and lethargic feelings are from the drink they just had during their lunch at school. More serious conditions have been reported, especially in children and young adults, are seizures, diabetes, cardiac abnormalities, mood and behavioral disorders or serious complications with certain medications. Of the 5448 US caffeine overdoses reported in 2008, 46% occurred in those younger than 19 years. Our agency recently surveyed 4900 kids in Southeastern Connecticut. We found that 38% of youth grades 7-12 drink energy drinks on a regular basis.

This brings us to another product, melatonin. This is another natural substance, if sold properly, that can benefit some people. However, the products sold in convenience stores are marketed to children to induce "relaxation and stress relief" and contain cartoon characters to induce youth. As one of the products says, "Drink a bottle to help you deal with that energy drink you had earlier, a loud neighbor or the general stresses of everyday life."

Despite the fact that many of these products contain the warning, "For Adults Only: Not intended for children under 18" they continue to be sold to high school students and younger. This bill would make great strides at preventing the sale to children.

In closing, our convenience stores are becoming the new drug store for kids to walk in and purchase stimulants, depressants and mood altering substances. This is not what I want for my children or the future children. These products need to have an age restriction on them of 18 years of age.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this bill.