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OREGON PARTNERSHIP OPTIMISTIC ABOUT UNDERAGE DRINKING BILLS IN LEGISLATURE: “MORE FOLKS IN SALEM ARE GETTING THE MESSAGE.”

(Portland, Ore.) Legislation cracking down on underage drinking – nothing short of a growing public health hazard - is making notable headway in the Oregon House and Senate.

“It seems we’re gaining momentum,” said Oregon Partnership deputy director Pam Erickson, a member of Oregon Attorney General Hardy Myers’ Underage Drinking Task Force.

“With a third of Oregon’s 8th graders drinking, we are heartened by the attention given to this problem by our legislators. We all can do something about underage drinking, and it’s great to know Salem is working on it.”

Oregon Partnership, a state-wide non-profit providing drug prevention education and treatment referral, was instrumental in initiating the task force recommendations.

Among the measures appearing to be gaining momentum in the Oregon Legislature:

* Expands the age range for a judge to suspend driver’s licenses of minors convicted of offenses involving alcohol or illegal drugs by raising the maximum age for suspension from 17 years of age to 20. HB 2147 passed the House.

* Stiffer penalties for minors in possession of alcohol while driving. HB 2148 passed the House and a Senate committee.

* Allows courts to order assessment and treatment convicted of possession to anyone under the age of 21. HB 2149 passed House committee.

* Making it easier for large cities to conduct random decoy operations to crack down on those selling alcohol to minors. HB 2150 passed House committee.

Last week, the U.S. Surgeon General proposed a “Call to Action’ against underage drinking and to change the culture and attitudes toward underage drinking in America.

The Attorney General’s Task Force and legislative proposals are available at the Oregon Department of Justice website at www.doj.state.or.us.

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