



DANE COUNTY YOUTH COMMISSION

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August 27, 2007

To: Stephanie Rearick, Chair
Alcohol License Review Commission

As the Alcohol License Review Commission considers adopting an Alcohol Density Plan for the City of Madison, the Dane County Youth Commission would like to share its concerns and some data on underage alcohol use.

The Youth Commission periodically conducts a self-report survey of Dane County students grades 7-12 on a number of health and social issues, including alcohol consumption. In 2005 the Youth Assessment data indicated that over 50% of high school youth report using alcohol, some rarely or occasionally. Almost 30% report using alcohol 1-3 times a month; 10% report using alcohol 1-3 times per week and 3% report daily alcohol use. A study of three California cities showed that communities with high outlet density have significantly higher levels of underage drinking as well as gang-related behavior. The national Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration indicates that youth who begin using alcohol prior to age 14 are four times more likely to become problem drinkers as adults. This research clearly indicates that underage drinking occurs in our community and that it increases the risk of alcohol problems later in life. We feel this data and the potential impact of alcohol density decisions on Dane County youth are important for public officials to consider in their deliberations regarding alcohol policy.

The analysis reported in the Wisconsin State Journal (Sunday, July 15, 2007, A-1) on student drinking in the downtown area paints a picture of young people very much out of control. Some young drinkers are exhibiting criminal behavior and some are victims of such behavior. Many college students who excessively consume alcohol are reportedly under the legal drinking age of 21. This issue also impacts high school students in our community who emulate university students when it comes to alcohol consumption. State Street is a big draw for high school students where busy bartenders often serve them without checking for proper identification. It appears there is a negative correlation between the number of alcohol outlets, the availability of alcohol to underage youth, and youth over consumption in the downtown area that requires significant consideration.

For the protection of our youth, the members of the Dane County Youth Commission *strongly encourage* the ALRC to review the available research and consider how youth are affected by alcohol density issues as a part the Alcohol License Density Plan development. The Youth Commission further recommends that the ALRC insure that licensed liquor outlets ask for proper identification from customers to avoid serving those under the age of 21.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. If you would like additional data or information, please phone or email us. We will be very interested in the outcome of your deliberations.

Sincerely,

Barbara Arnold, Chair
Dane County Youth Commission

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