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**SUNDAY ALCOHOL SALES AND EXPANDED COLD BEER SALES:
NOW MORE THAN EVER, INDIANA CAN'T AFFORD THIS "CONVENIENCE"**

Once again, Indiana's grocery, drug and convenience stores are pushing to expand alcohol availability by demanding both the sale of alcohol on Sunday and the sale of cold beer in their establishments. And once again, their reasoning is based on two points: economic gain both for themselves and the state and consumer convenience.

Drug Free Marion County's response to these demands remains the same: Now more than ever, Indiana can't afford the "convenience" of these policies. Alcohol is already widely available to Indiana consumers, and any economic gain by those who might benefit from such laws would be offset by a significant loss for public health, safety and finances.

"The establishments leading the demand for increased availability of alcohol are doing so to increase their own profit margins. They are not taking into consideration the very real and serious consequences of adding to the existing saturation of alcohol in our community," says Nancy Beals, prevention project coordinator for Drug Free Marion County.

While supporters of expanded alcohol sales claim that the state will gain \$9 million in tax revenue from these policies, Indiana is already spending much more than that for the costs of alcohol misuse and abuse under existing sales laws. A study by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation showed that underage drinking alone cost Hoosier taxpayers \$1.4 billion in 2007, up from \$1.3 billion in 2005.

And those statistics don't take into account costs resulting from at-risk drinkers of any age, such as alcohol-related crashes and crimes, law enforcement needs, social services, medical care and work loss. In Indiana, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, alcohol is involved in 47 percent of homicides, 42 percent of fire injuries, 34 percent of drownings and 23 percent of suicides in Indiana.

Increase availability of alcohol, and the costs of misuse and abuse increase as well. In 2004, the World Health Organization reported that most studies show alcohol consumption or the rate of harmful alcohol-related effects increase with increased sales times. Many studies have established direct correlations between high alcohol availability and increases in drunken driving, sexual assault, crime and violence.

“These critical health and safety issues affect a much larger number of individuals than would be ‘convenienced’ by Sunday and expanded cold beer sales,” Beals says.

In fact, according to a report by the national Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, adult binge drinkers make up only 23 percent of the population but consume 76 percent of the available alcohol, while frequent binge drinkers represent only seven percent of the population, but drink 45 percent of the alcohol.

“These individuals are consuming a significant portion of the alcohol sold, and they are the very ones who have the most potential to harm themselves and the public – 40 percent of which does not drink at all,” Beals says. “Making alcohol more convenient to those at-risk drinkers is not in any community’s best interest.”

And while those pushing for Sunday sales say consumers have a right to purchase a legal product at their leisure, that right already can be exercised widely, even though alcohol is regulated and controlled due to its potential harmful effects on the human brain and body. Under Indiana’s current laws, alcohol can be sold in retail locations from 7 a.m. until 3 a.m. Monday through Saturday (20 hours per day) and 120 out of 168 hours weekly.

“Consumers are not at a disadvantage when it comes to opportunities to buy alcohol at a retail location when they can purchase it more than 80 percent of the time six days a week and nearly three-quarters of the time over a week’s period,” Beals says.

And when it comes to cold beer sales, expanding their reach to convenience, drug and grocery stores also expands availability to at-risk drinkers. A report by beersoaksamerica.org shows that beer is the drink most commonly consumed by people stopped for alcohol-impaired driving or involved in alcohol-related crashes. A full 80 percent of drivers arrested for DWIs nationwide said beer was their drink of choice.

“Providing even more opportunities for the perfect drink-and-drive product is not the type of convenience Indiana needs,” Beals says. “Alcohol-related crashes in our state already cost residents \$1 per drink – that adds up to millions of dollars. We need to be reducing the risk factors for drinking and driving – not making them even more accessible.”

Simply put, Beals says, it’s time for public health and safety to take precedent over an argument based on profit margins and on a lack of convenience that doesn’t actually exist.

“Alcohol is already widely available and accessible in Indiana and Marion County,” she says. “And public health and safety – and the taxpayers’ wallets – are already struggling to handle the social and economic consequences. Increasing the availability of alcohol on Sundays and expanding the sale of cold beer should not be a legislative priority. Protecting and improving public and fiscal health and the safety of our communities would be the most valuable ‘convenience’ we could receive.”

Drug Free Marion County – a not-for-profit organization – plans, promotes, implements and coordinates community efforts to prevent and reduce the abuse of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs among youth and adults.