

NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL AND THE ND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

March 9, 2009

PREVENTING UNDERAGE DRINKING IS FOCUS OF JOINT CAMPAIGN

BISMARCK – Preventing underage drinking is the focus of a joint campaign announced today by Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem and Carol K. Olson, Executive Director of the ND Department of Human Services. The campaign is being rolled out with a brochure mailed to parents of middle and high schools students across the state. The campaign was developed in response to a 2008 survey of communities across North Dakota, which found higher than expected tolerance for teenage alcohol use.¹

“The results of the survey were shocking,” said Stenehjem. “One-third of the adults responded that in their community, teenage drinking was acceptable. The survey illustrated the need to raise awareness among parents and the community about existing laws and the extent of the underage drinking problem.”

“Education and prevention begin at home,” said Olson. “We want to help parents begin a conversation with their children about underage drinking. We hope those conversations will be followed by discussions in school and in the community about preventing underage drinking.”

The campaign includes posters and brochures. Materials developed for adults provide information about the laws and civil and criminal penalties and other consequences of underage drinking. Materials developed for young adults and teens outline the consequences of underage drinking and provide tips on how to deal with peer pressure and make healthier choices.

“Teen drinking appears to be viewed with more tolerance than youth tobacco or other drug use. This attitude hampers law enforcement efforts and puts youth at risk. As we approach the high school prom and graduation season, it is essential to educate everyone about the problems associated with underage alcohol use,” said Stenehjem.

“By middle school, one third of North Dakota students have already used alcohol. To be effective, prevention efforts need to begin at an earlier age. This campaign also includes age appropriate activity books for preschool and elementary age children, which focus on healthy choices and identifying healthy activities,” Olson said.

- MORE -

¹ Alcohol and Other Drugs in North Dakota - Community Readiness Survey 2008 (Department of Human Services).

Regional and Tribal Community Substance Abuse Prevention Coordinators have been heavily involved in developing community support for the campaign. Public and private schools, because of their regular and significant involvement with families, have helped get the information to parents and students.

North Dakota colleges and universities, local businesses, and other community partners have also committed to participating in the campaign, and many are displaying posters. The campaign is funded through an Enforcement of Underage Drinking Laws block grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

More information about the campaign and other department prevention efforts is available online at <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/prevention.html>.

###