

Maryland Bans Retail Sales of Grain Alcohol

Newswise — Maryland Gov. O'Malley on Monday signed legislation banning the retail sale of alcohol 190-proof and stronger effective July 1. Maryland joins the ranks of more than a dozen other states that ban the sale of such products, including Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Virginia.

Extreme-strength alcohol (also known as grain alcohol) is 95 percent pure and has no color, taste or smell when mixed with juice or punch. Its inexpensive price, as low as 38 cents per drink, makes it especially attractive to underage drinkers. According to a recent national survey, underage binge drinkers are far more likely to use extreme-strength alcohol than their non-binging peers.

"Grain alcohol is seen as a cheap and reliable way to get drunk quickly, sometimes without the person knowing it. Not surprisingly, its potency and low price make grain alcohol a popular option for college students," said Jonathan Gibraltar, president of Frostburg State University and a key proponent of the legislation.

Banning extreme-strength alcohol was a top priority of The Maryland Collaborative to Reduce College Drinking and Related Problems, a group formed in 2013 to address problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption on ten college campuses across the state.

"This ban on the retail sale of grain alcohol demonstrates the impact of a strong collaboration among Maryland's universities and colleges," said Johns Hopkins University President Ron Daniels. "Through our shared efforts around this important issue, we can hopefully make a positive difference for the health and safety of the young adults on our campuses."

"We'd like to thank Sen. Rich Madaleno and Delegate Charles Barkley for sponsoring these bills, and Chairman Joan Carter Conway and Chairman Dereck Davis for providing leadership in their respective chambers," said University System of Maryland Chancellor Brit Kirwan. "Their strong commitment to protecting young adults was critical to the success of this life-saving legislation."

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism estimates that, nationwide, drinking on college campuses is annually responsible for 1,825 deaths, 599,000 unintentional injuries such as car crashes and falls, 696,000 physical assaults, and 97,000 sexual assaults. Recent polling data from OpinionWorks shows that 69 percent of Marylanders consider excessive alcohol use on college campuses to be a serious or very serious problem.

In Maryland, 19 percent of underage and 22 percent of 21- to 24-year-old college students meet criteria for either alcohol abuse or dependence, and almost one-third of underage Maryland college students have driven under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

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The Maryland Collaborative to Reduce College Drinking and Related Problems addresses excessive drinking among college students as a statewide public health problem, provides public health expertise and support to implement effective interventions and policies, and provides a forum for sharing information and support among colleges statewide.

The Collaborative is led by a Governance Council of 10 college presidents, co-chaired by University System of Maryland Chancellor Brit Kirwan and Johns Hopkins University President Ron Daniels, and staffed by teams of public health experts at the University of Maryland, College Park and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

More information on the Maryland Collaborative may be found at www.marylandcollaborative.org [1].

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