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Contact:

Laura Smith, Health First Wisconsin; Office: 608.443.4369, Cell: 608.556.5055

Health First Wisconsin Speaks Out Against Free Liquor Sample Bill

Madison, Wis., February 8, 2012— Health First Wisconsin today spoke out against Assembly Bill 480, a bill that would allow certain retailers, including gas stations and grocery stores, to distribute free samples of distilled spirits.

“The last thing Wisconsin needs is to pass a law that would allow bachelorette parties to go from grocery stores to gas stations to get drunk off free liquor samples,” Maureen Busalacchi, executive director of Health First Wisconsin, said. “Wisconsin is the #1 binge drinking state in the country. Do our legislators really think the people of Wisconsin need free booze?”

According to a recent U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report, Wisconsin is the nation’s worst binge-drinking state – with a fourth of all adults reporting they were binge drinkers. Wisconsin’s binge drinking rate is 50 percent higher than the national average. Wisconsin is also worst in the nation in drinks per binge drinking episode and the state consistently ranks near the top in drunk driving arrests and drunk driving fatalities.

AB 480 would allow "Class A" licensed retailers, which include grocery stores and gas stations, to provide taste samples of distilled spirits on their licensed premises. Individuals would be allowed three, 0.5 fluid ounce taste samples per person per day between the hours of 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.

This bill builds on this Legislature’s troubling efforts to increase access and availability of alcohol. AB 63 passed by the Legislature at the end of last year allows Class A licensees to sell alcohol for two additional hours. It is well-known that increasing alcohol access and availability are the two primary factors leading to risky and problem drinking, including binge and underage drinking. AB 480 would increase the access and availability of free distilled spirits – which have a much higher alcohol content than beer.

“For Wisconsin to seriously address our alcohol culture, we need our legislators to start tackling our alcohol issues and help us find ways to make our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces and schools safer and healthier for everyone,” Busalacchi said. “Health First Wisconsin encourages the Legislature to concentrate on reducing youth drinking instead of giving out free booze. We urge our legislators to think about reducing intoxicated driving, not increasing it by giving out free shots at the grocery store and gas station. The simple fact is that giving out free liquor samples creates more alcohol-related problems for this state – not more solutions.”

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