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UNDERAGE DRINKING IS COSTING FLORIDIANS $3 BILLION A YEAR

TALLAHASSEE, FLA. – Each year, the economic impact of alcohol-related crime, traffic crashes, health care and other costs totals slightly more than $3 billion statewide.

Alcohol-attributable violent crime was responsible for the greatest costs to society, accounting for 48% or $316.3 million of total underage drinking costs.

Traffic crashes were next, with an economic tab of $642.7 million for medical and emergency services, lost productivity, workplace and legal costs, property damage and other costs, according to *Economic Costs of Underage Drinking in Florida,* a new study released by the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Other economic impacts detailed in the county-by-county report included:

- Risky sexual behavior — $291.1 million
- Fetal alcohol syndrome — $75.4 million
- Medical and other costs for alcohol-related injuries — $202.5 million
- Suicides and suicide attempts — $48.3 million
- Alcohol abuse treatment — $2.8 million.

Six counties alone accounted for 52% of the total estimated cost: Miami-Dade, Broward, Orange, Palm Beach, Hillsborough and Duval. The study's authors said the higher costs were linked to higher crime and traffic crash rates in these areas.

The study found that most of the economic burden of alcohol abuse falls on those individuals who do not abuse alcohol. Taxpayers bore 38.6% of the total costs.

Researchers also computed the overall costs per youth. These averaged $627 per person under the age of 21 and $1,818 per youth between the ages of 14 and 20. These costs were the result of approximately 180 youth deaths and 71,602 injuries and other events directly attributable to underage alcohol use.

"This study shows that in addition to the human toll of underage drinking, there is also an economic cost that affects us all," said Bill Janes, DCF Assistant Secretary for Substance Abuse and Mental Health. "The numbers underscore the need to expand effective prevention programs that

encourage Florida's youth not to use alcohol before they're 21. These programs can potentially generate significant savings to Florida's taxpayers by reducing many of the negative consequences associated with underage drinking."

"We especially want to involve parents in our prevention efforts, because research shows that parents and other significant adults are the key factors in determining whether or not a teenager decides to drink," he said. "Communities also have a role to play in protecting teens and promoting alcohol and drug-free lifestyles."

He noted that the 2008 survey of alcohol and drug use by Florida's middle and high school students indicated that most do not drink, and the number of those who do is declining. However, the percentage of those who reported drinking during the past 30 days continues to be higher than the national average — 37% compared to 29.3%.

Janes said that the study provides a "blueprint" for Florida's state and local policy makers. "It has implications for law enforcement and the health care and insurance industries, as well as for health and social services agencies."

Economic Costs of Underage Drinking in Florida was a project of the State Epidemiology Workgroup, a multidisciplinary group comprised of a range of experts from throughout Florida. The corresponding author of the study is Michael T. French, Ph.D., of the Treatment and Prevention Evaluation Group at the University of Miami's Comprehensive Drug Research Center. Cost estimates in the study are for 2007.

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