



Licensing and Administrative Procedures Committee
HB 849 – Relating to Powdered Alcohol
Testimony by Maria C. Monge, MD, FAAP
April 16, 2019

Testimony submitted on behalf of:

Dell Children's Medical Center
Ascension Seton
Ascension Providence
Texas Pediatric Society
Texas Medical Association

Good Morning Chair King and Committee Members,

My name is Dr. Maria Monge, and I am the Director of Adolescent Medicine at Dell Children's Medical Center. I am here today on behalf of Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas/Ascension Seton/Ascension Providence, the Texas Pediatric Society, the Texas Medical Association, and myself to testify against HB 849 by Representative Guillen.

Powdered alcohol is a powerful substance that poses significant, negative effects on the developing brain. Powdered alcohol is a significant risk to the future generations of Texans if allowed to make its way to market. It makes alcohol more easily accessible, concealed, consumed, misused, and overconsumed. Given the well-known risks of adolescent alcohol consumption and the inability of regulation to keep alcohol from being consumed by teenagers, banning the production and sale of powdered alcohol – not regulation – is the best way to keep adolescents safe from this potential threat to their lives and to the lives of others.

Alcohol Use in Adolescents

Alcohol use in adolescents is already a significant problem in Texas. In our state, the average age of an adolescent's first alcoholic drink, defined as more than 1 or 2 sips, is 13 years of age (Texas School Survey 2014). More than 1 in 10 Texas high school students report binge drinking in the past 30 days while almost 1 in 20 report extreme binge drinking, defined as more than 10 drinks in a row, in the past 30 days (Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2018). Among college students in Texas, three out of four report drinking alcohol in the past year (Texas School Survey 2014). The consequences of adolescent alcohol consumption are also well documented, as within the past year, there have been cases of tragic traffic fatalities in Texas caused by teen drivers under the influence of alcohol. Powdered alcohol presents a frightening opportunity for adolescents to access, consume, and very easily overconsume alcohol in potentially new and deadly ways.

Adolescent Brain Development

In Texas, alcohol is the most common substance abused by teenagers (Texas School Survey 2014). Adolescents are particularly susceptible to substance abuse as a result of the development of the brain occurring in stages. In early adolescence the "reward center" of the brain matures rapidly. The reward center leads to significant risk-taking behavior, a well-known characteristic of adolescence. Alcohol triggers immediate signals in the reward center, making teenagers especially susceptible to the addictive properties of alcohol.

In older adults, the reward center is kept "in check" by the prefrontal cortex, a different part of the brain that develops much more slowly. The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain responsible for reducing risk-taking behaviors. The pre-frontal cortex does not fully mature until the mid-20s.

Adolescent brain development occurs in the context of complex social development where teens are relying less on their parents and more on their friends and social influences to shape their decision making. Physiologic and social development puts adolescents at significant risk for the adverse effects of alcohol. Decision making capabilities are significantly different in an adolescent brain than in an adult brain.

As an adolescent medicine, fellowship-trained physician, I strongly support banning the manufacture, import, sale, or possession of powdered alcohol – not regulating it which would legitimize it in the marketplace. Banning, not regulating, powdered alcohol will prevent access to a product easy to conceal, misuse, and overconsume that poses a significant health threat to children and adolescents.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony against HB 849. Banning, not regulating, will keep powdered alcohol out of the marketplace and help protect our teenagers while their brains are learning, maturing and growing.