

Statement of Jim O'Hara

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Before the

Interagency Coordinating Committee on the Prevention of Underage Drinking

Room 610F, Hubert H. Humphrey Building

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Mr. Curie, distinguished members of the Interagency Coordinating Committee, thank you for inviting the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University to present to you today. The Center was established with grants from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to provide solid, reliable and verifiable data on the amount of alcohol advertising reaching the underage audience.

Public health begins and ends with surveillance. Using industry standard measures of advertising exposure we have tried to provide a kind of public health surveillance that we believe has been lacking when it comes to preventing and reducing underage drinking. We have tried to move the policy debate on alcohol advertising from anecdote and conjecture to data and analysis. As you can see from the Center's reports included in the packets we have provided, the extent of underage youth exposure to alcohol advertising is widespread across the media of magazines, television, radio and the Internet. In many instances our children, on a per capita basis, are being exposed to far more alcohol advertising than adults. With alcohol company self-regulation the principle means of protecting youth from this exposure, ongoing independent public health surveillance of this kind is critical.

But I would also like to take this opportunity to speak more broadly to the recommendations of the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. The recommendations for better coordination and leadership at the federal level by establishing a permanent interagency committee led by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, issuing an annual report with key indicators, including brand questions

on federal public health surveys, a national training and research center – all of these recognize that the best way to reduce underage drinking is to provide solid, reliable data to the public and to policymakers so that we are all accountable and shoulder the collective responsibility called for by the NRC/IOM. So, too, in calling for a national media campaign aimed at adults and providing resources to states and local communities, while holding them accountable for their use of those resources, the NRC/IOM has given us a plan of action. As much as resources, this is a call for political will and resolve.

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