

# LATE TESTIMONY

## HAWAII SUBSTANCE ABUSE COALITION

**Topic:** HB903 RELATING TO INTOXICATING LIQUOR.

**To:** COMMITTEE ON HEALTH: Representative Ryan Yamane, Chair; Representative Dee Morikawa, Vice Chair

**When:** Feb. 8, 2011, Monday, at 9:30 am

**Place:** Conference Room 329

Aloha Chair Yamane, Vice Chair Morikawa and Distinguished members. My name is Alan Johnson, I am the Chairperson of the Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition, a hui of about 20 alcohol and substance abuse treatment agencies in Hawai'i.

### HSAC Supports HB903

#### **Summary:**

A certain percentage of the population has a higher receptivity to addiction than most. It is estimated to be around 9%. Further, most individuals who eventually reach chronic stages of addiction did exhibit symptoms in their adolescent stage. It is a young person's disease.

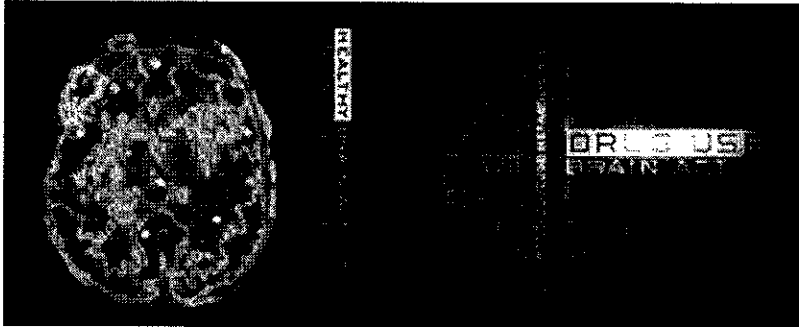
It is critical that proper labeling is used to inform adolescents about harmful effects of alcohol content and to limit access for those drinks to those adults whose brains are more developed and less receptive to debilitating, long term harm.

#### **Explanation:**

As a result of scientific research, we now know that addiction is a disease that affects both brain and behavior. While biological and environmental factors do influence addiction, we are beginning to better understand the genetic variations that contribute to the development and progression of the disease.

Despite these advances, there are still many people today who do not yet understand why individuals become addicted to drugs or how drugs change the brain to foster compulsive drug abuse. We believe that increased understanding of the basics of addiction will empower people to make informed choices in their own lives, adopt science-based policies and programs that reduce alcohol and drug abuse and addiction in their communities, and support scientific research that improves the Nation's well-being.

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## **Why is adolescence a critical time for preventing drug addiction?**

Early use of alcohol and drugs increases an adolescent's chances of more serious drug abuse and addiction. Remember, excessive use of alcohol or drugs change brains - and this can lead to addiction and other serious problems. So preventing early use of drugs or alcohol may reduce the risk of progressing to later abuse and addiction.

Teens' still-developing judgment and decision making skills may limit their ability to assess risks accurately and make sound decisions about using drugs. Drug and alcohol abuse can disrupt brain function in areas critical to motivation, memory, learning, judgment, and behavior control. So, it is not surprising that teens who abuse alcohol and other drugs often have family and school problems, poor academic performance, health-related problems (including mental health), and involvement with the juvenile justice system. Adolescents who abuse drugs often act out, do poorly academically, and drop out of school. They are at risk of unplanned pregnancies, violence, and infectious diseases.

## **Conclusion:**

Alcohol consumption, especially for adolescents, can damage the brain and most body organs. Areas of the brain that are especially vulnerable to alcohol-related damage are the cerebral cortex (largely responsible for our higher brain functions, including problem solving and decision making), the hippocampus (important for memory and learning), and the cerebellum (important for movement coordination).

While many events and cultural factors affect abuse trends, when youths perceive alcohol or drug abuse as harmful, they reduce their level of abuse. Simply, drug use decreases when alcohol or drugs are perceived as harmful. It is important to properly label and identify harmful aspects to adolescents and to limit access for youths to such harm producing alcohol or drug use.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide information and are available for questions, if needed.