

Sen. Ridgeway's Anti-Alcohol Vaporizer Bill Receives Strong Public Support

JEFFERSON CITY— Many community organizations, advocacy groups and alcohol distributors have teamed up with Sen. Luann Ridgeway, R-Smithville, in an effort to stave off a potential public health risk. Senate Bill 38, which Ridgeway is sponsoring to prohibit the possession and use of alcoholic-beverage vaporizers, was recently heard in committee, where several witnesses testified on behalf of the bill.

Alcohol vaporizers, which are being marketed as “AWOL,” or Alcohol Without Liquid, through their online distributor, use an oxygen generator to convert hard liquor into a mist that can be inhaled. This speeds up the intoxication rate by getting the alcohol to the bloodstream without having to go through the stomach and liver.

“This method of getting drunk might be extremely effective, but it is also extremely dangerous,” Ridgeway said. “By allowing our teenagers to have legal access to these machines, we are exacerbating underage drinking problems and paving the way for unnecessary alcohol-related illnesses and deaths.”

Even though the high cost of the machines, which runs from approximately \$300 to \$3,000, has seemingly slowed down sales in Missouri, Ridgeway says that it is only a matter of time before the market pounces on this get-drunk-quick scheme. Because of all the health and public safety risks that are caused by alcohol, she wants the Show-Me State to legislatively address the problem before it's too late. AWOL machines have already been outlawed in several states, including Illinois, and an all-out ban is being considered in others.

“If these machines are legal, people will use them. And that is something we can't let happen,” Ridgeway said. “No one has testified against the bill, so I expect it to pass because it's good policy in the name of public safety.”

Among those who spoke on behalf of the bill at the Jan. 22 hearing were Mike Schler from the Division of Alcohol and Tobacco Control, Rod Forth from Anheuser-Busch, Vicky Ward from Tri-County Mental Health and Brad Fisher, a senior from Smithville High School.

Committee approval of the bill will send it to the Senate floor for debate by the full body.



Sen. Ridgeway is pictured above with Brad Fisher, senior at Smithville High School, who has worked hard to discourage underage drinking. He testified at the committee hearing for Senate Bill 38 on Jan. 22, 2007.