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that is morally wrong.*

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JEFFERSON CITY

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More Tools to Combat Underage Drinking Get Hearing *Sen. Ridgeway's Alcohol Abuse Bill Presented to Judiciary Committee*

JEFFERSON CITY— More tools to help law enforcement and community advocated to combat underage drinking were presented to a Senate committee this week. Sen. Luann Ridgeway (R-Smithville) introduced Senate Bill 747 that was heard before the Senate Judiciary and Civil and Criminal Jurisprudence Committee. The bill contains several aspects intended to prevent the abuse of alcohol and is gaining strong public support.

"Alcohol abuse is a serious problem affecting Missourians and particularly, Missouri's youth," said Ridgeway. "This legislation is another step in combating the dangerous, and sometimes deadly, effects of alcohol."

The crux of the bill would prohibit the possession or use of an alcoholic beverage vaporizer, a device that allows one to essentially feel the effects of alcohol at a more rapid rate by converting hard liquor into a mist that can be inhaled. Inhalation then speeds up the rate of intoxication by bypassing the stomach and liver and going directly into the bloodstream. The devices are already banned in 22 states.

Ryan McElhaney, a youth prevention specialist with Tri-County Mental Health Services, testified at the hearing in support of the bill.

"Underage drinking is a huge problem in Missouri," said McElhaney. "The AWOL (Alcohol Without Liquid) device is harmful, and it gives youth another reason to experiment with alcohol. Last year we had one or two students in a classroom who knew what an AWOL device is; now more than 50 percent have heard of it."

Another aspect of the bill would bar minors charged with three minor in possession violations from receiving educational cost reimbursement under the "A+ Schools Program," an incentive program that helps Missouri students pay for college.

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COMBATING UNDERAGE DRINKING

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The legislation would also hold those who provide alcohol to minors or knowingly allow minors to drink on their property accountable to the minor's parent or guardian if the minor suffers harm as a result. The final major component of the measure relates to a minor who refuses a breathalyzer test, making it possible for an officer to deem that individual "visibly intoxicated." A minor could then be charged with a minor in possession offense.

"I commend Sen. Ridgeway's commitment to outlawing alcohol vaporizers in Missouri, as well as sponsoring legislation that creates even more tools to combat underage drinking," said co-sponsor, Senate President Pro Tem Michael R. Gibbons. "We've worked with students, parents, law enforcement and advocates from across the state to learn what they need to help them be more successful in preventing students from drinking, and these changes are what they need."

A passing vote from the Senate committee moves Ridgeway's bill to the Senate floor for debate by the full body. Joint Senate and House approval moves the proposal to the governor's desk. To track the legislation visit www.senate.mo.gov and do a "key word" search for SB747.

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