

October 6, 2005

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger  
Governor  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

I am writing you concerning AB 417, a bill that would wrongly legitimize the widespread distribution in California of sweet, easy-to-drink youth-oriented alcoholic beverages (“malternatives,” “alcopops”) that appeal significantly to underage and other novice drinkers. The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) urges you to stand up for the health of California’s children and veto that bill. We note with great appreciation and respect that you recently signed legislation to improve youth nutrition by getting soda and junk food vending machines out of schools, and we commend you for that highly principled action. Currently, you have a similar opportunity to spare children from the excessive marketing of alcoholic products that pose severe risks to their health and long-term well being.

CSPI has carefully studied the marketing of “malternatives” and “alcopops” since 2001. Our research with adults and teenagers over two years, conducted by polling firms Penn, Schoen & Berland and Global Strategy Group, yielded numerous strong findings, including: those beverages have been highly targeted to young – including underage – persons and this targeting contributes to underage drinking; they are favored among young people (in particular, young women) because they disguise the taste of alcohol and resemble familiar soft drinks; the beverages appeal more strongly to teenagers than to adults; the American public overwhelmingly identifies the products as “starter or gateway drinks,” or bridges to “more mature” alcoholic beverages, and; adults strongly support restrictions on the marketing of “alcopops” to youth.

When we examined the public’s attitudes about the promotion of *liquor-branded* “alcopops,” we found that: young people were likely to be in the television audience when “alcopop” advertisements appeared; teenagers have high unaided product and brand recall of advertisements they see; teens were highly aware of liquor-branded “alcopop” ads; and that teens think that those advertisements are hard-liquor commercials. (For

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your information, I am enclosing summaries of the findings of the two studies; more information is available at our website, [www.cspinet.org](http://www.cspinet.org).)

Since our studies, additional research by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth and the American Medical Association has confirmed virtually all of the major findings. In short, “alcopop” products are gateway drinks that ease young people’s entry into the alcohol market. They represent just the first way-station in alcohol producers’ plans to introduce them to other products and to secure them as regular alcohol consumers. As with cigarettes, young people who start drinking early are more likely to become addicted. The beverages in question unquestionably increase the odds that young people will start and that they will move on to beverages other than beer, specifically distilled products in which the alcohol is much more highly concentrated.

For the above reasons, “alcopops,” which derive much, if not all of their alcohol from spirits sources, should continue to be considered and regulated (distributed, taxed, and advertised) as the distilled products they are or pretend to be. They are not beer. Please consider the views of California’s Attorney General, of California Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and of dozens of health, safety, child-protection and religious groups in California and around the country. You have an important opportunity, not only to safeguard the health and safety of young people, but also to assist the interests of parents, who need help to counter the burgeoning promotion and availability to children of desirable, new-age, sweet, fruity alcoholic beverages. You can also provide needed national leadership in efforts to prevent and reduce today’s alarming levels of underage and binge drinking.

We urge you to veto AB 417. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

George A. Hacker  
Director  
Alcohol Policies Project