

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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**YOUTH AND RETAIL MERCHANTS LAUNCH LOCAL
CAMPAIGN TO CURB ALCOHOL MARKETING EXPOSURE TO YOUTH**

Augusta—“Underage drinking is not a harmless issue. It is a serious problem that costs millions of dollars each year. It causes crime, lost human potential, and sometimes kills,” stated First Lady Karen Baldacci at a press conference yesterday organized by members of the Youth Empowerment and Policy (YEP) group, a statewide youth advocacy group consisting of high school and college students.

At the press conference, YEP members unveiled a first in the nation Alcohol Retailer’s Local Marketing Code of Conduct. YEP members developed the Code in partnership with local alcohol retailers. In 2005, YEP conducted a survey of 500 Maine students that demonstrated that young people are exposed to a significant amount of alcohol marketing and that young people were attracted to and influenced by this marketing. “We are concerned and upset by the negative impact underage drinking has on our friends, schools and communities,” said Vanessa Ouellette, YEP member, in her opening remarks, “and we are determined to do something about it.” YEP members determined that they wanted to reduce youth exposure to alcohol marketing and looked at local point of sale marketing as something they might be able to influence.

The release of the Code of Conduct was YEP’s kickoff to a local campaign to reduce the effects of alcohol marketing on Maine’s Youth. Irving Oil and the Alliance Energy Corporation have endorsed and/or supported the concept of the Code of Conduct and received special recognition from YEP as being responsible retailers. “This Code is all about marketing our products to the right people in the right way,” said Al Bugbee, Senior Operating Manager of Irving Oil Corporation, “The work that YEP has done with this initiative is a great example of the leadership that we need in all of our communities for generations to come.”

First Lady Baldacci and Attorney General Steven Rowe thanked YEP for the incredible work that they have done thus far. Attorney General Rowe told the youth, “While you may not know it, you are heroes to those of us working on alcohol policy issues around the state and nationally. You surveyed young people and found that alcohol marketing encourages underage drinking. You translated your findings into action. You are demonstrating great leadership in taking on such an important issue. Your actions will help prevent young people from becoming statistics.” Rowe also challenged local retailers and wholesalers to become familiar with the new Marketing Code and to comply with it.

Youth and merchants supporting this initiative are asking local groups to work together to change marketing practices in their communities. Merchants that can demonstrate that they have made good faith efforts to comply with the Code will be given the “*Our Town/Our Children*” award designating them as a “Youth and Family Friendly Store”. YEP’s goal is to award 200 plaques to merchants over the next twelve months.

For more information on Youth Empowerment and Policy projects please visit our website and www.neias.org/YEP