



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: Maria Alvarado – [malvarado@txsdy.org](mailto:malvarado@txsdy.org) | (917) 513.4862

## Tarrant County Agencies Meet to Develop Strategies for Confronting Underage Drinking and Protecting Local Youth

(Tarrant County, TX | February 11, 2021) – Statewide advocacy group Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth (TxSDY) hosted a wide-reaching regional forum designed to address the issue of underage drinking and impaired driving. Partnering with local leadership, educators, parents and youth, TxSDY's forum hosted dozens of local leaders and residents committed to tackling the issue with targeted approaches specific to the Tarrant County community. Recognizing the pressing need to develop targeted strategies specific to underage youth, the event featured key leaders from local school districts. Regional partner Challenge of Tarrant County and three of its community coalitions – SMART Arlington, SOAR (Stand Out Act Responsibly) and Stay on Track – co-sponsored the event.

“The local community plays a critical role in working to address substance use and impaired driving issues. From parents to educators to law enforcement, we all want to do everything possible to keep our kids safe,” said **Nicole Holt, CEO of Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth**. “Today’s forum will help provide local families and leaders with resources and tools they can use to create safer communities. Through engagement, collaboration and open, honest discussion I know we can successfully turn the dial toward preventing youth substance use and reducing alcohol-related injuries and deaths.”

“Underage youth are some of the most vulnerable to bad decisions when it comes to drinking,” said **Abbie Byrd Hancock, Program Director for SMART Arlington**. “They have their whole futures in front of them, and we must do everything in our power to make sure they are able to reach their full potential. Today’s event provides real, accessible resources for us to work together as a community to protect our youth and provide them with a safe, supportive environment where they can thrive.”

According to the Tarrant County Sheriff's Office, more than 200 alcohol-related arrests were made in Tarrant County in two weeks alone (January 19 – February 2.) Nearly 150 of those arrests were road incidents and two resulted in vehicular manslaughters. Statewide, Texas saw nearly 25,000 DUI crashes in 2019, and underage drivers under the influence were involved in more than 1,600 crashes statewide that same year. 85 underage deaths in 2019 were the result of a DUI crash.

Facing this data, the forum stressed the urgent need for action. Participants worked to collaboratively address:

- Trends in youth substance misuse
- Key prevention strategies
- Local community needs
- Collaborative approaches to create community change
- Successful steps for community engagement and mobilization

The Tarrant County event is part of a series of forums TxSDY is hosting across the state. The events seek to facilitate introductions between stakeholders in the community, increase collaboration and engagement and mobilize participants to reduce underage drinking and impaired driving in a coordinated and strategic way.

### **About Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth**

Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth is the state's leading organization working to end underage alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. Founded in 1997, with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation administered by the American Medical Association, the statewide coalition builds on the strengths and successes of its longtime identity, Texans Standing Tall, while bringing new focus and energy to its mission of creating healthier and safer communities. More information can be found at <http://txsdy.org>.

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