



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Deep East Texas Community Leaders Meet in Collaborative Effort to Combat Underage Drinking and DUI Injuries and Deaths

With region facing numerous alcohol-related fatalities and serious injuries, and Polk County targeted as TxDOT high priority, issue is critical for local community

Nacogdoches, Polk, and Angelina Counties represented at Regional Forum

(Lufkin, TX | March 30, 2022) – Statewide advocacy group Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth (TxSDY) today hosted a wide-reaching Regional Forum designed to address the issue of youth substance use and in particular, underage drinking and impaired driving. Partnering with local leadership, parents and youth, TxSDY's Forum hosted local leaders and residents committed to tackling the issue with targeted approaches specific to the Deep East Texas community. Regional Partners co-hosting the event were The Alcohol and Drug Abuse Council of Deep East Texas, ATI SNAKNI - Native Connections, and The Coalition of Angelina County. Local leader Elliott Abbey, Director of Realty for the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, also shared his personal story about drinking during his youth and how his life – including college and scholarship opportunities – were affected as a result.

“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 Deep East Texas 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.”

Already, the community is working hard to address underage drinking issues. According to the local Prevention Resource Center Regional Needs Assessment, while Lufkin makes up only 0.1% of the State’s population they are conducting approximately 6% of all the minor alcohol compliance checks in the state.

“The realities of underage drinking and intoxicated driving affect our local community in devastating ways. But in facing this issue, we also know that working together, we can defeat it,” said **Sharon Kruk, Executive Director of The Coalition of Angelina County**. “We can stop underage drinking, lessen the toll it has on our community and prevent more unnecessary deaths from occurring. This is not simply a national problem or

something you just hear about on the news. It is right here, in our local communities, and we all have the power to do something about it. Our hope is that today's event inspires us all to continue to work together for our families, our neighbors and our youth."

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 Lufkin 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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