

For Immediate Release: February 16, 2015

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Florida Sheriffs Urge Defeat of Dangerous and Controversial Liquor Retailing Legislation

Coalition of Law Enforcement Professionals Issue Warning

Tallahassee, Fla. – A coalition of Florida Sheriffs announced their opposition today to legislation that would allow the sale of hard liquor in grocery and drug stores.

Duval County Sheriff John Rutherford, Orange County Sheriff Jerry Demings, and Walton County Sheriff Mike Adkinson warned that repeal of the so-called “separation law” would lead to an increase in underage theft and consumption of hard liquor.

Current Florida law restricts hard liquor sales to a store that sells only liquor plus related products, and requires liquor stores to have a single, separate entrance facing the outside. These restrictions exist primarily to control direct access to hard liquor by minors.

House Bill 107 by Rep. Greg Steube (R-Sarasota), House Bill 499 by Rep. John Wood (R-Winter Haven), and Senate Bill 468 by Sen. Denise Grimsley (R-Sebring) would repeal these requirements and allow retailers to sell hard liquor in their main stores with no access control.

“Minors who enter a liquor store stick out like a sore thumb because they don’t belong there,” said Duval County Sheriff John Rutherford. “These common sense controls don’t inconvenience responsible adults, but they do help keep hard liquor out of the hands of our kids.”

“I am concerned that the proposed change is an unnecessary expansion of alcohol availability that could increase underage drinking and take us in the wrong direction,” said Orange County Sheriff Jerry Demings.

“This proposal raises a lot of alarm bells in my mind,” said Walton County Sheriff Mike Adkinson. “I haven’t heard anyone complaining about finding a convenient place to buy liquor, but I have heard that in states where this legislation has already passed, law enforcement is now having to combat rising incidents of theft and illicit underage drinking inside the stores themselves.”

“We have to choose what's right for our kids and our community. Keeping hard liquor where it belongs and under proper control just makes good common sense,” said Demings. “Kids and hard liquor don’t mix.”

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