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Jenna Shankman: Alcohol here is a shared responsibility

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In Santa Cruz County, we constantly wrestle with the issues that drive public safety. As we look at who ends up in our criminal justice system, we recognize that alcohol plays a major role. Alcohol is a factor in over 40 percent of our jail bookings. Deputies responded to over 1,300 calls since January 2017 in which alcohol was a contributor and made 251 arrests for public intoxication. The California Highway Patrol reported 313 collisions involving drivers under the influence in 2016, and more deaths occur as a result of drunken driving than by homicide in our County.

For youth, the numbers are also startling. The 2015 California Healthy Kids Survey reports, that 34 percent of Santa Cruz County 11th graders reported drinking in the past 30 days compared to the 29 percent at the California state level, while 73 percent claim that alcohol is easily accessible in our county. At Juvenile Hall, 89 young people had alcohol-related referrals last year.

Together, our county and our community service providers have engaged in broad prevention efforts with youth and help those suffering by providing treatment services to address public health. Our last line of defense has been our Sheriff's Office and criminal justice system that engages this vulnerable population and works to keep our community safe.

Relying on the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) to monitor, inspect and enforce the law has not proven effective. ABC is understaffed with only two officers assigned to respond to concerns for San Benito, Monterey and Santa Cruz County. In order to protect the health and wellbeing of our community we must address the impact of alcohol locally.

As we seek to address this growing problem, we have identified a tool used throughout the state to ensure that those involved with selling alcohol play a role in helping with this issue. We have reviewed what 21 jurisdictions in the state are doing to deal with the impact of alcohol through the enactment of various "Deemed Approved" ordinances. Locally, the Santa Cruz Police Department passed a Deemed Approved ordinance in 1995, which has resulted in a successful partnership with the alcohol retail outlets in the city of Santa Cruz and law enforcement. These policy tools

combine community outreach, education and training with compliance of the ABC standards and enforcement among the alcohol retail outlets when necessary.

This week, the Board of Supervisors will be considering an ordinance referred to as the Alcoholic Beverage Retail Outlet Nuisance Abatement Program for all alcohol retail outlets in the unincorporated county of Santa Cruz. Modeled after the one used in the city, this program would partner the Sheriff's Office with those who sell alcohol directly to the consumer in order to better manage this problem at the front end. This new ordinance will require all alcohol retail outlets in the unincorporated areas of Santa Cruz to pay an annual fee to run a program with a dedicated full-time Alcohol Compliance Officer and a Program Manager who will coordinate and promote community preventative outreach through training and education, conduct site inspections of current outlets to ensure compliance, as well as investigating outlets that are reported to have excessive complaints. After talking with members of the business associations, the California Restaurant Association and the Santa Cruz Mountain Winegrowers Association, a change has been made to the fees to reflect the different impacts of different establishments.

The county already requires pharmaceutical companies and sharps manufacturers to help pay for the cleanup of their products. They also charge a fee to tobacco retailers to help enforce tobacco regulations, and this has contributed to a reduction in youth smoking. And most recently, voters enacted a special tax on cannabis to help with the issues of education and enforcement. By strengthening our compliance capabilities and our prevention efforts, we can reduce the negative impact that alcohol plays in our community's public safety. We urge the Board of Supervisors to adopt the Alcoholic Beverage Retail Outlet Nuisance Abatement Program.

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