

Testimony for House Bill No. 252

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I am Jo Ann Walsh Dotson, the Bureau Chief of the Family and Community Health Bureau in the Department of Public Health and Human Services:

On behalf of the Department of Public Health and Human Services, we offer our support of HB 252, which requires that increased revenue from taxes on alcoholic beverages must be used by the Department Of Public Health And Human Services for the prevention of or treatment of effects related to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder; amending sections 16-1-401, 16-1-404, 16-1-406, 16-1-411, and 53-24-108, MCA; and providing an effective date and an applicability date.

FASD is an umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. These effects may include physical, mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong implications. The term FASD refers to conditions such as fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), fetal alcohol effects (FAE), alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder (ARND), and alcohol-related birth defects (ARBD). Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, unlike many other birth defects, is 100% preventable through changes in maternal behavior.

The true prevalence of FAS is unknown but estimated to range from .5 to 2 cases per 1000 births in the U.S. (May, P., Gossage, J.P., Estimating the Prevalence and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, A Summary. Alcohol Research and Health 2001 Vol. 25, No 3 159-167). In Montana this would mean that approximately 110 infants are born each year affected by prenatal alcohol exposure. Although Montana is a rural, sparsely populated state, the prevention of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), is a major public health issue.

The literature contains two well-documented estimates of the total lifetime cost for a person with FAS. Harwood and Napolitano estimated lifetime cost at \$596,000 in 1980. If this estimate is adjusted for the change in the cost of medical care services, lost productivity, and inflation, the adjusted 2002 cost becomes \$2.0 million for each individual with FAS. This figure is made up of \$1.6 million for medical treatment, special education, and residential care for persons with mental retardation, and \$0.4 million for productivity losses.

The Public Health and Safety Division will use the revenue to support home visiting services annually for at-risk women and parenting families with infants and young children who may be at-risk, if not yet diagnosed, with fetal alcohol syndrome. The Public Health and Safety Division implement a statewide and community specific campaign to educate the public regarding FAS prevention and to educate primary care providers about state-of-the-art screening techniques and referral potential. The revenue will be used to help diagnose children who were exposed to alcohol prenatally through contract diagnostic services using a multi-disciplinary team.

FASD is 100% preventable. When you are pregnant your baby drinks what you drink. If you're pregnant, don't drink. If you drink, don't get pregnant.

We believe that this legislation will help prevent children from being born with prenatal alcohol exposure, and strongly lend our support to this legislation.

Committee:	Taxations
Hearing Date:	Thursday, Jan 13
Hearing Time:	8 a.m.
Place:	Rm 152