



AG REILLY, ABCC TAKE ACTION AGAINST ONLINE ALCOHOL RETAILERS ACCUSED OF SELLING TO UNDERAGE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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BOSTON - Attorney General Tom Reilly is suing four out-of-state online retailers accused of violating the state's liquor laws and selling alcohol to underage buyers – area college students who participated in undercover stings initiated by AG Reilly and the Alcohol Beverages Control Commission (ABCC). AG Reilly also forwarded evidence against three other online alcohol retailers and three shippers to the ABCC, which has initiated administrative actions against these businesses.

AG Reilly detailed the court actions today at a joint press conference with Treasurer Timothy Cahill, who oversees the ABCC, announcing the results of their investigation into online alcohol sales in Massachusetts. The stings, conducted in 2002 and 2004, found that seven companies sold alcohol to underage buyers via the Internet and three shipping companies delivered shipments to underage buyers in violation of state law. AG Reilly has referred three of the Internet sellers who shipped alcohol to individuals under the age of 21 and three shipping companies to the ABCC.

“Alcohol can be lethal when placed in the wrong hands,” AG Reilly said. “We have to do everything we can to keep alcohol away from our kids until they are old enough to make responsible decisions about its use.”

“Alcohol is the number one substance abuse problem of today's youth,” Treasurer Cahill said. “I am proud that our offices are working together to address the critical issues of underage drinking and access to alcohol.”

The four companies named in lawsuits are: Sherry-Lehmann Wines and Spirits of New York, NY, which operates www.sherrylehmann.com, Wine Globe of San Mateo, CA, which operates as www.wineglobe.com, Queen Anne Wines and Spirits Emporium of Teaneck, NJ, which operates as www.queenannewine.com, and Clubs of America of Lakemoor, IL, which operates as www.greatclubs.com.

In this spring's enforcement effort, AG Reilly's Office enlisted the help of five area colleges – Boston College, Northeastern University, Merrimack College, Stonehill



College, and Bunker Hill Community College – who identified college students to participate in the undercover sting. These college students placed orders for alcohol from online sellers and had shipments sent directly to their homes. All transactions were done under the supervision of investigators from AG Reilly’s Office. In each case, the underage college students were able to order beer, wine or hard liquor – including tequila and vodka – without having to verify their age. They then successfully received these shipments of alcohol without having to present identification indicating that he or she was 21 years old. The sting found that, at most, some sellers required the students to check a box indicating that he or she was at least 21. Other sellers did not ask for any proof of age. Regardless, all five college students received shipments at home without having to provide any form of identification or age verification. A similar sting conducted by the ABCC in 2002, also using an area college student, had similar results.

Based on evidence from the stings, AG Reilly and Treasurer Cahill also allege that FedEx on four different occasions failed to follow instructions on the outside of the package alerting company employees that alcohol was being sent and a signature from someone who is at least 21 was required.

AG Reilly and the ABCC initiated an investigation into online alcohol to address the pervasive problem of underage drinking. According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA), 87 percent of adults who drink had their first drink of alcohol before age 21. 2003 research from CASA also found that individuals who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to become alcohol dependent than those who begin drinking at age 21. The CASA study also found that the prevalence of lifetime alcohol abuse is greater for those who begin drinking at age 14. The Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Education at 50 randomly selected public high schools across the Commonwealth in the spring of 2003, found that 1 in 4 public high school students had initiated alcohol use before the age of 13.

"I have seen for myself, as District Attorney and now as Attorney General, how destructive underage drinking can be to our children and to our families and communities in Massachusetts," AG Reilly said. "This is a serious problem, and making alcohol available online to young people — the segment of our population that is by far the most Internet-savvy — only makes that problem worse."