

**Testimony of Mary Ann Solberg
Executive Director
Troy Community Coalition
for the Prevention of Drug and Alcohol Abuse and
the Coalition of Healthy Communities,
Troy, Michigan**

**A Three-Pronged Strategy for Successful
Youth Drug Abuse Prevention**

Chairman Castle, Representative Kildee, and members of the sub-committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the success of a three-pronged strategy for youth substance abuse prevention in Troy, Michigan. Before I begin, I thank you for your support of substance abuse prevention and your desire to hear success stories from communities across the country.

I am the Director of the Troy Community Coalition (TCC), a prevention partnership begun in 1990 and strengthened in 1991 with a partnership seed grant from Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP).

I have been asked to comment on Substance Abuse Prevention Education. As the leader of a successful substance abuse prevention Coalition, I rely strongly on a three-pronged prevention matrix -- a partnership of schools, parents and community.

Many communities build their prevention efforts around the foundation provided by the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities program. Numerous schools have utilized this program to begin prevention coalitions. This was the case in Troy where a strong multi-sector results-oriented program developed.

The suburban community of Troy, Michigan, is located 10 miles northwest of Detroit. Its school district is quite diverse, with students having the facility and/or native background to speak 52 languages. The district's high schools excel in athletics, academics and fine arts. The community is served by the Troy Community Coalition for the Prevention of Drug and Alcohol Abuse, which was created in 1990 by the Troy School District when a student survey showed an increase in student drug use and an accompanying increase in acceptability in both the community and the schools of alcohol

and substance use/abuse. Since that time the Coalition has served as the advisory group to the district's Safe and Drug-Free Schools program, while the school district provides office space and other services to the Coalition.

The Troy Community Coalition has been exceptionally successful in mobilizing ALL elements of the population base within its community where it serves as a de facto model for substance abuse and violence prevention efforts. The Troy Community Coalition has made significant improvement in community norms relative to substance abuse use/misuse and is committed to continuing a communications message to the community through social marketing techniques. The TCC has been recognized by area media for its promotion of a regulated shelving of alcohol project, a community ban on cigarette vending machines, and the elimination of alcohol sponsors for a popular community athletic event.

The Troy Community Coalition constantly works to hone its mission and to find innovative, research-based strategies to present the substance abuse prevention message. There is ongoing support from businesses, both large and small, as well as individuals and organizations. Successful fund raisers include the annual Oakland County High School Slam Dunk & 3-Point Shot Basketball contest and a Celebrity Dinner. The Coalition also receives support from the City of Troy and Oakland County and is particularly proud of its close working relationship with law enforcement and the courts. The Coalition treasury is used to support parent education, youth training, a social club for recovering adults, community policing, camp for children from addicted families, and training for servers and sellers of alcohol. Other accomplishments include:

- An Oakland County Medical Association resolution against the medical use of marijuana except in regulated testing,
- Unprecedented cooperation facilitated among Troy Parks and Recreation, the Troy Police Department, the Troy School District and the Coalition,

- Community monitoring of the indicators of substance abuse among the school district, police department, health care organizations, businesses and residents,
- Supportive radio and newspaper editorial policy, and periodic appearance on network television programs by the staff and volunteers,
- Development of the Troy Employees Assistance Consortium for small businesses now being run by the Chamber of Commerce,
- Direct service programs that assist pregnant women, pre-schoolers, youth, families, adults, seniors and business.

Moreover, the Coalition:

- has grown from nine to more than 140 members, including agencies, organizations and individuals;
- sponsors a Leadership Academy for high school students;
- conducts the “Neighbor by Neighbor” program that has achieved 50% reductions in drug abuse, reports of child abuse and other drug-related violence in a targeted area;
- offers direct service programs, including education and training, that help people understand the risks associated with drug abuse;
- provides Pilot Project grants to groups leading prevention programs in communities;
- has created an umbrella coalition to extend this success to contiguous communities;
- enjoys a close, cooperative working arrangement with law enforcement and the courts that includes co-sponsorship (with Troy police) of a Friday night jam session for youth;
- has developed a senior citizen volunteer bureau, and
- works with the school district on a middle school tobacco prevention project.

The Troy Community Coalition’s strategies are effective in part because they address multiple sectors of the community. From its inception the Coalition has used a

research-based philosophy that promotes a three-pronged approach to youth substance abuse prevention, an approach that relies on interaction among and between the schools, the community and parents. We believe that the school district is responsible for a strong anti-drug curriculum that provides students with the skills and knowledge to say “no” to alcohol and drug use. The Coalition works to change community norms through public policy, education and alternative activities. Both the schools and the Coalition work in partnership to educate parents and involve them in the Coalition’s programs and goals. By working closely with the schools and leveraging the school-based programs to encompass the community, the Troy Community Coalition believes it triples the value of dollars spent on school-based programs.

This multi-sectored approach outlined above, using a set of risk and protective indicators as an evaluation matrix, has resulted in clear positive outcomes as determined by a team of evaluators from Oakland University. These outcomes include, I am proud to report, a drop in alcohol use among high school seniors of 8.8%.

Briefly summarized, the 1991 needs assessment survey that was undertaken in the Troy community indicated that children and adults were susceptible to a wide range of risk factors. Perceived community norms for substance abuse and the low perceptions of risk and legal consequences for substance abuse are factors that contribute to increasing use of alcohol and drugs. Other enabling factors included availability and easy access to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and adolescent skill deficiencies (such as goal setting, problem solving and refusal skills). Finally, factors reinforcing drug use were found in every sector of the community. Family factors (low parental disapproval for alcohol, tobacco and other drugs use), peer factors (high peer approval and peer use), societal factors (exposure to advertising), school factors (insufficient prevention programs), as well as factors in the judicial system, health care community, faith community and community leadership all contribute to increasing risk of alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse in the community.

Today, due to the combined efforts of school, parents, and community, protective factors are working to deter alcohol, tobacco and other drugs use/abuse. A strong

substance abuse prevention curriculum in the school system, strong and active parenting groups, high community expectations and commitment, many houses of worship and strong family participation, strong commitment on the part of elected officials and a proactive community policing program do much -- though not all -- to offset the risk factors discussed above.

The drug-free curriculum currently in place in the Troy schools, supported by Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities funding, is strongly skewed toward instilling risk resiliency: helping kids acquire the skills and knowledge to avoid alcohol and drug use. If outside financial resources decline, the substance abuse program in the schools will suffer. While we have every confidence that the Troy School District would continue the drug-free curriculum and support of the Troy Community Coalition to the extent possible, we also must recognize that there are multiple demands on a modern school district and school budgets can be stretched only so far.

The Troy School District has been an important partner with the Troy Community Coalition. Together they have forged a strong and successful community prevention effort.

However, Troy is not an anomaly among America's suburban communities. There are many such towns and cities that have registered success in addressing substance abuse and violence, working hand in hand with the public schools to bring about that success and building on the school-based curriculum to generate community programs. Schools must have constant resources to maintain these programs. We must maintain one of the most important tools we have: the involvement of our schools in developing knowledgeable, resilient youth who are capable of and committed to living productive, healthy lives free of alcohol and illegal drugs.

While I can speak directly only to the successes in my own community of Troy, I believe that if all school districts adopted a consistent set of evaluators to gauge success from one year to the next and formed strong community partnerships, the success experienced in Troy could be duplicated across the country.