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Drunk driving prevention bill approved by Senate Committee

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SAN DIEGO – Legislation by California Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez (D-San Diego) to require all restaurant and bar employees who sell or serve alcoholic beverages to undergo Responsible Beverage Service training was approved on a 10-0 vote by the Senate Governmental Organization Committee today.

Assembly Bill 2121 will make responsible beverage training mandatory statewide for anyone serving alcoholic beverages. The Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control will authorize an accreditation agency to accredit responsible beverage training providers. Educating beverage servers in bars and restaurants is a key part to reducing drunk driving fatalities. Although the ABC currently has a free and voluntary program, existing training programs in California are not mandatory at the state level.

“Innocent people are put at risk every day when drunk people get behind the wheel, and preventable tragedies rip apart families and communities while we wait to act,” said Gonzalez. “Preparing our servers to effectively intervene before reckless behavior destroys lives adds an easy line of defense to keep our communities safe.”

In May 2015, two UC San Diego medical students were killed by a wrong-way drunk driver in the Mission Valley area of San Diego. The drunk driver was leaving a local restaurant when he went the wrong way on State Route 163 and caused the collision that killed two and injured three other students. In the wake of the accident, classmates of the victims have worked with Assemblywoman Gonzalez and her office to develop legislation that would better equip servers to identify signs of overconsumption and intervene before tragedy strikes.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, more than 10,000 people throughout the United States die on our roadways due to drunk driving every year, the equivalent of one fatality every 53 minutes. Even though training is not currently mandatory at the state level, many local governments have made training mandatory. Additionally, 18 other states and the District of Columbia have already established a mandatory responsible beverage training course.

AB 2121 is coauthored by Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia (D-Coachella) and Senator Richard Pan (D-Sacramento), sponsored by the California Medical Association, and supported by health and public safety organizations including the California Police Chiefs Association, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, American Academy of Pediatrics, California County Health Executives Association of California, Alcohol Justice and the San Diego Police Officers Association. It will next be considered in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

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