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An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, TD

Dept of the Taoiseach

Government Buildings

Merrion Street Upper

Dublin 2

15/05/2025

Dear Taoiseach,

We are writing in support of healthcare colleagues, social organisations and advocates in Ireland, to ask that the planned introduction of regulations on health information labelling of alcohol products is not derailed or delayed by alcohol industry lobbying. We strongly believe that consumers have the right to know that alcohol is harmful and mandatory health labelling would give the public access to information about health risks associated with alcohol, including those linked to pregnancy, at least seven types of cancer and liver disease.

Balance is an alcohol prevention programme based in the North East of England – the region which suffers from the greatest alcohol harms in the country and one of our key roles is to advocate for evidence-based national action to reduce those harms, such as reducing the affordability, availability and promotion of alcohol, in addition to wider cost effective interventions, such as mandatory alcohol health labelling. In this regard, we look with envy at the enlightened public health policies introduced in neighbouring jurisdictions and we believe that the Irish Government should take pride in its leadership around alcohol prevention. As with the smokefree

legislation 20 years ago, we are hopeful the English Government will acknowledge the evidence and follow suit.

We have noted with concern the latest attempts from the alcohol industry to derail the proposed regulations around alcohol labelling. Previous efforts have included claims that the warning language is “disproportionate and inaccurate” and primarily geared toward “scaring people”. We would directly contradict these claims with the strong evidence that the risk of certain cancers – including breast cancer – increases from the first drink; and as is the case in Ireland, liver disease and alcohol specific deaths have increased dramatically over recent years, with the highest rates here in the North East. The spiralling health harms from alcohol simply cannot be ignored.

As you know, the legislation for alcohol warning labels was passed in 2018 after extensive debate and with support from right across the political spectrum, matched by continuing strong public support of over 70 per cent for the measure. Critically, the debate was informed by the research base which was clearly articulated by multiple health experts and advocates, many with deep experience of the harms from alcohol. With the cost of alcohol harms rising on an annual basis and a huge impact upon frontline services, including the health service and the police, there are also sound economic reasons for adopting an evidence-based approach to alcohol prevention.

With all of this in mind, we strongly agree that the public should be provided with facts about the health risks from alcohol and that public health should be prioritised ahead of the profits of the alcohol industry. As the World Health Organisation clearly states, the alcohol industry should have no influence on the development of public health policy and we would urge you to remain resolute and proceed with the planned introduction of the health labelling regulations in May 2026.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Ailsa Rutter'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ailsa Rutter OBE

Director of Fresh and Balance

