



## Orange County Youth-Led Community Grassroots Effort Stops Alcohol Sales in Movie Theater

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ALISO VIEJO, CA (January 24, 2015) -- Alcohol Justice is reporting that the Aliso Viejo city council voted Wednesday night (1/21) to deny Regal Entertainment Group's Edwards Aliso Viejo 20 & IMAX Theater a license to serve beer and wine. The 4 to 1 vote against the alcohol license was the result a strong grassroots effort that generated 2 demonstrations, a [website](#), a petition with 1500 signatures, hundreds of emails to council members, over 150 citizens attending city council meetings, 50 speakers with over 2 ½ hours of public comment against the license, and a number of newspaper and TV stories.

*"The significance of this victory should not be underestimated,"* stated Michael Scippa, Director of Public Affairs for [Alcohol Justice](#), the San Francisco Bay Area-based industry watchdog. *"A community of concern came together, led by youth, and said NO to more alcohol availability in their city. Less availability means less harm, especially to young people."*

The city council first met on January 7<sup>th</sup> to vote on the issue. Around 30 citizens came to the meeting with 7 giving public comment against the license. With youth leading much of the effort after that point, a dozen high school and middle school students joined in demonstrating in front of the theater on a Saturday and Friday evening. *"I was surprised at how many people cared about this; every teen my age signed the petition without hesitation"*, said Jacob Hansen, a freshman at Aliso Niguel High School who presented the petition signatures at the following city council meeting.

At the next council meeting January 21<sup>st</sup>, 150 concerned citizens attended, with 47 citizens voicing public comment (all against the license). Some expressed concerns over intoxication and attracting a different crowd of people, and even speculation over how a child's experience using the restroom might change if there are adults present that have been drinking. Many arguments quoted [statistics](#) linking alcohol availability to underage drinking and adolescent alcoholism. Youth speakers cried hypocrisy that the high school holds a red ribbon week urging students to stay away from alcohol, and yet the city planning department approved putting alcohol in the theater armrests next to them.

Unconvincing arguments from the theater included the need to stay competitive with other theaters and a willingness to make whatever modifications necessary to comply with the license requirements.

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Munzing expressed his desire to approve the alcohol license and dismissed the [public comments](#) as *"...all based on emotion with no facts,"* prompting some attendees to leave the room in protest. Councilman Phil Tsunoda reaffirmed his adamant opposition to the license and, as he had done in the first meeting, motioned to deny the alcohol license to the theater. Mayor William Phillips seconded his motion and the council then voted 4 to 1 to repeal the approval of the license. Munzing was the lone council member to vote against the repeal.

*"We won the case! No alcohol in our theater!"* posted Kenny Virgin, a junior at Aliso Niguel High School who had participated with his sister in the two demonstrations and had collected hundreds

of signatures. Under his post, his father commented, "It was a good experience for our youth to see that they can influence our community for good."

"The Aliso Viejo theater advocates and city council are to be highly commended for challenging the social norm that says to enjoy any activity you need a glass of booze in your hand," added Scippa. "Alcohol Justice hopes that this impressive victory will empower other communities across the country to take similar actions to reduce alcohol availability and harm."

**For more information:** [www.alcoholfreemovies.com](http://www.alcoholfreemovies.com) and [www.alcoholjustice.org](http://www.alcoholjustice.org)



Aliso Niguel High School student Jacob Hansen, 14, second from left, collects signatures from theatergoers as fellow students Marie Hansen, 16, center, and Sydney Stewart, 14, outside Edwards Theaters in Aliso Viejo, CA  
KENT TREPTOW, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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