

# Lower Drinking Age Will Cause More Problems

Contributed by Ashley McDonald -- Black College Wire  
Thursday, 25 September 2008

Initiative may lead to even more alcohol abuse

One of the major milestones that some college students look forward to is their 21st birthday. This is the day when they can legally walk into a restaurant and have a glass of wine with their dinner or walk into a liquor store to purchase their drink of choice.

Most college students are in their junior year by the time they reach this pivotal point. But a group of college presidents and chancellors have joined together to form the Amethyst Initiative. And they are convinced that the 21-year-old minimum drinking age is ineffective and contributes to a higher incidence of binge drinking on college campuses nationwide.

There is much controversy surrounding this group because a possible alternative solution that has been proposed is lowering the legal drinking age to 18. The National Minimum Drinking Age Act was passed in 1984, setting the minimum drinking age at 21 and charging states 10 percent of federal highway dollars if they decided to set it lower. The act is up for reauthorization next year.

The logic behind lowering the drinking age is that legal drinking will appear less thrilling than doing it illegally. Therefore, students will be less compelled to drink if it is not taboo.

At 18 years old, many students are still in high school. So if binge drinking is causing problems on college campuses, who is to say that the same thing will not happen in high schools?

"The behavior of 18-year-olds is particularly influential on youth ages 15 - 17, as young people typically imitate the practices of those who are slightly older, rather than the practices of those who are significantly older," according to a fact sheet published by the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "Therefore, if 18-year-olds can legally drink, their immediate, younger peers will drink too."

Seniors in high school would be able to furnish alcohol at high school parties just as easily as those of legal drinking age can furnish alcohol to underage drinkers at college parties. Both instances present a crime. But on college campuses, at least the offenders are legal adults. In high school, you would have children even more exposed to alcohol and the dangers that it presents.

When alcoholism spills over into the halls of the high schools, will we then consider allowing 16 year-olds to go into a restaurant and order a Grey Goose martini - shaken not stirred?

Before you know it, the kindergarteners will be carrying flasks in their pencil pouches.

Is it really worth solving one problem to potentially fuel another one? Making alcohol more accessible to children may result in students not even making it to college to experience all that it has to offer. That would definitely reduce the incidences of binge drinking that the Amethyst Initiative finds is such a huge problem.

College administrators are tired of having to deal with disciplining underage drinking offenders. It happens so often that they are constantly having to funnel time and money into punishing those that get caught breaking the rules. So why not just eliminate the rule all together to make their jobs easier?

Eighteen year-olds are adults in every sense except for the fact that they cannot legally drink. That much is true. But at 18 years old, individuals have not had the opportunity to truly experience life. They are just getting a sense of not having to live by their parents' rules. Having that type of freedom for the first time can cause people to act irresponsibly.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving has been the main group opposing the Amethyst Initiative. And they have every right to be concerned. Teenagers are not mature enough to handle the responsibilities that come with the privilege of being able to legally consume and possess alcohol, especially when operating a motor vehicle comes into play.

In an article published in 1984, the same year that the National Minimum Drinking Age Act was passed, in The Journal of Legal Studies it, states, "The reason for concern is that teenagers as a group are far more accident-prone than older drivers."

We live in a much more volatile society than the society of 1984. If it was a problem then, it is definitely a problem now.

While all 21-year-olds are not the portrait of maturity, having to wait until 21 gives students something to look forward to. Turning 18 is already a milestone all in itself, allowing young people to vote, enlist in the military and legally be responsible for themselves. Making the minimum drinking age 18 will give them a lot of freedom all at once. Even if college students drink while they are 18 to 20 years old, at least they will have time to develop some restraint, learn their limits and gain some maturity before they are allowed to do it in public.

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