

WHY SHOULD SOUTH CAROLINA SUPPORT A DRINKING AGE OF 21?

IT SAVES LIVES!

- A drinking age of 21 is one of the most studied public policies ever, and the research is clear – prohibiting individuals under 21 from drinking reduces traffic fatalities among young adults by 16%. (Shults et al., 2001)
- Removing this policy would cost our state more than 10 underage lives per year, while the creation of a “21 drinking age” is credited nationally with having saved 1,000 lives per year. (Projection based on SC DOT data, 2008; NHTSA, 1989)
- New Zealand has already proven what would happen if people under 21 were allowed to drink. Lowering of the drinking age in that country was immediately followed by increased fatality rates among 18- and 19-year-olds (51% for females) *and* among 15- to 17-year-olds! (Kypri, 2006)

IT MEANS HEALTHIER YOUTH AND ADULTS!

- Youth who drink before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence and 2½ times more likely to become alcohol abusers than those who wait until age 21. (Grant, B.F., & Dawson, D.A., 1997)
- Earlier use of alcohol is associated with higher lifetime rates of homicide, suicide, academic failure, other drug use, assault, rape, alcoholism, alcohol poisoning, unprotected sex, car crashes, injuries, falls, STDs, property damage, and police involvement. (Various studies)
- Research shows that when the drinking age is 21, people under age 21 drink less overall and continue to drink less throughout their early 20s. (O’Malley & Wagenaar, 1991)

IT MAKES SENSE – AND CENTS!

- Brain research shows that the brain develops well into the 20s and that youth alcohol use can impair cognitive skills such as memory and decision-making. The last areas of the brain to fully develop are the ones most important to decision-making. (Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking, 2007)
- This means that all underage drinking is unsafe drinking.
- Underage drinking costs South Carolina \$899 million per year. (Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, 2005) That cost would only increase if more young people were allowed to drink legally.
- Lowering the drinking age generates great media buzz but is generally an unpopular idea. A 2007 Gallup poll showed 77% of Americans would oppose a federal law lowering the drinking age to 18. (MADD, 2008)

THE DRINKING AGE: MYTHS & FACTS

Myth: The current law makes youth want to drink because it's a "forbidden fruit."

Fact: When the "forbidden fruit" is no longer forbidden, youth simply drink more. In states where the drinking age was 18, those under 21 drank more than youth in states where the minimum drinking age was 21, and they continued to drink more as adults in their early 20s.

Myth: Europeans let their kids drink at an early age, yet they don't have the alcohol-related problems we do.

Fact: In most European countries, young people have higher intoxication rates than in the United States, and less than a quarter had lower or equivalent rates to the United States.

Also, a greater percentage of young people in a majority of European countries report binge drinking at higher rates than compared to their U.S. counterparts.

Myth: If I'm old enough to go to war, I should be old enough to drink.

Fact: Many rights have different ages of initiation. You can get a hunting license at age 12, drive at 16, vote and serve in the military at 18, serve in the U.S. House of Representatives at 25, and serve as the U.S. President at 35. Other regulated rights include the sale and use of tobacco, and legal consent for sex and marriage. Vendors such as car rental businesses and hotels also have set the minimum age for a person to use their services – 25 years old to rent a car and 21 years old to rent a hotel room.

And these minimum ages are set for a reason. In the case of alcohol, 21 is the minimum age because a person's brain does not stop developing until his or her early- to mid-20s.

Also, keep in mind that we don't place 18-year-old soldiers in harm's way until they have had intense training, and they are under experienced leadership. Does that sound like the environment of young-adult drinking?

Myth: Drinking is just a phase all kids go through; they'll grow out of it.

Fact: Many *don't* grow out of it. Those who start drinking before they're 21 are more likely to drink *more* later in life versus those who do not drink until they are 21. Sadly, some never have the opportunity to grow out of it – 5,000 people a year die as a result of underage drinking.

(www.why21.org)