

## ***AMETHYST INITIATIVE***

July 2008- Chancellors and presidents of over 129 universities and colleges across the U.S. signed their name to a public statement calling lawmakers to consider lowering the drinking age to 18. At present three NJ school presidents have signed on: Drew University, Montclair University, Stevens Institute of Technology. The presidents feel that the current MLDA (minimum legal drinking age) is not working and cite a “rising culture of dangerous and clandestine binge drinking”.

**Professionals on both sides of this argument agree that alcohol is the number one youth drug problem in America.** “Alcohol is zealously marketed, easily obtained, inexpensive and existing laws are not consistently enforced. Combine these factors with the widespread belief that alcohol is a benign drug, creates fun, and is sexy and it becomes a pervasive force within the culture; one very seductive to youth” - Drug Free Action Alliance.

The initiative is facing sharp criticism, some from their own peers. Numerous presidents have asked their colleagues to reassess this petition. “Signing this initiative does serious harm to the education and enforcement efforts on our campuses and ultimately endangers young lives even more” - University of Miami President Donna Shalala. Most presidents agree that there should be more focus on prevention strategies and less interest in purely trying to dodge alcohol liability.

National, state, and local organizations, senators and congressmen have all come out publicly against the initiative. The MLDA laws are the most studied public health laws in history.

Some basic facts supporting 21 as the legal drinking age:

**-Lowering drinking age costs lives.** In the 70’s when the age was lowered to 18 there was a huge increase in fatalities. States found the younger the drinker the more likely they were to drive drunk. The National Minimum Drinking Age Act was created in 1984. “Since that time there has been a 78% decrease in # of New Jersey young people ages 18 to 20 who were killed in drunk driving crashes” - Attorney General Anne Milgram.

**-Lower drinking age promotes unsafe binge drinking in today’s society.** European countries (with the exception of Turkey) with lower drinking ages have higher binge and intoxication rates. As a result the UK, Canada, and Amsterdam are presently considering raising their drinking ages to 21.

**-Delaying age of first use of alcohol reduces its effects on young adult’s physical/mental development.** Research shows that the learning, memory and judgment functions of the brain are not fully developed until the early 20’s. Damage is believed to be irreversible. The later one drinks the less likely they will suffer from alcohol dependence later in life.

-There is a “**trickle down**” effect when youth get alcohol, they often give it to even younger teens. In a nationwide poll, 72% of adults think lowering the drinking age would make alcohol more accessible to kids. It is believed that lowering the drinking age will then be putting children at even younger ages in harm’s way from problems resulting from intoxication: violence, pregnancy/STD’s, physical/mental developmental delays, criminal activity, public humiliation (internet/cell phone pictures).

To obtain more information on the above topics go to:

[www.amethystinitiative.org](http://www.amethystinitiative.org), [www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org), [www.drugfreeactionalliance.org](http://www.drugfreeactionalliance.org), [why21.org](http://why21.org), or search “Amethyst Initiative” to read numerous Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, NY Times articles.