

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Amethyst Initiative Statement Calls for Dialogue About the National Minimum Drinking Age

The Amethyst Initiative is a letter signed by a group of chancellors and presidents of U.S. universities and colleges to initiate a dialogue about the national minimum drinking age. As of August 31, 129 chancellors or presidents have signed a Presidential Statement asserting that the 21 year-old drinking age is not working and encouraging elected officials to “support an informed and dispassionate public debate over the effects of the 21 year-old drinking age.” At the same time, other organizations have publicly criticized the Initiative, including Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Governor’s Highway Safety Association . Following are the main points of the Presidential Statement of the Amethyst Initiative, along with alternative viewpoints.

Amethyst Initiative Statement	Alternative Viewpoints
“A culture of dangerous, clandestine “binge-drinking”—often conducted off-campus—has developed.”	Other solutions to reducing binge drinking include enforcement of the current minimum age law, changing the environment found on many college campuses, and working with local establishments in college communities to sell alcohol responsibly. ^{2,3,4}
"Alcohol education that mandates abstinence as the only legal option has not resulted in significant constructive behavioral changes among our students."	Alcohol education on responsible drinking will not result in behavioral changes among students. ^{2,3}
"Adults under 21 are deemed capable of voting, signing contracts, serving on juries and enlisting in the military, but are told they are not mature enough to have a beer."	Many rights have different ages of initiation (e.g., driving, voting), based on the specific behaviors involved and the dangers and benefits of that behavior at a given age. ^{1,3,4}
"By choosing to use fake IDs, students make ethical compromises that erode respect for the law."	Students are able to use fake IDs because of a lack of enforcement. Lax enforcement is no excuse to repeal a law that saves the lives of hundreds of teenagers a year. Fake IDs will be used regardless of the minimum drinking age. ¹

The viewpoints listed above offer only a sample of the minimum drinking age issues. The following websites offer more detailed information, and we encourage our readers to visit these to more fully understand all sides of this topic.

- Amethyst Initiative (www.amethystinitiative.org)
- Choose Responsibility (www.chooseresponsibility.org)
- ¹Opposing Views (www.opposingviews.com/questions/should-the-drinking-age-be-lowered-from-21)
- ²Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) (www.madd.org)
- ³Why 21 (www.why21.org)
- Higher Education Center Age 21 Publications (www.higheredcenter.org/services/publications/keyword/108)
- ⁴HEC Age 21 FAQs (www.higheredcenter.org/faq/108)
- Choose Responsibility response to HEC’s FAQs (www.amethystinitiative.org/filemanager/download/10872)