
THE PROBLEM
Underage drinking remains a serious problem for America’s youth. Reducing the legal drinking age is not the answer. Research has proven that the age 21 law has saved thousands of lives in traffic fatalities alone. Teenage drinking has decreased since Congress raised the drinking age in 1984. In addition, every year a child delays alcohol use, that child’s lifetime risk of alcohol use problems decreases dramatically. New research on brain development shows that adolescent brains are not fully developed before age 21. Alcohol damages this development process. The solution is to embrace, not walk away from, our commitment to keeping children away from alcohol.

WHAT THE BILL DOES
The Support 21 Act of 2009 affirms support for the age 21 law and builds upon the STOP Act (PL 109-422) in enabling community coalitions, health care providers, and parents to engage in efforts to reduce underage drinking.

1) Launches a media campaign on the public health and safety benefits of the age 21 law. Authorizes $22 million per year for the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) to launch a highly visible media campaign to educate the public about the public health and safety benefits of and basis for age-21 minimum legal drinking age laws, and build support for their enforcement.

2) Offers supplemental grants to help community organizations reduce underage drinking. Authorizes $5 million per year in supplemental grant funds to current and former Drug-Free Communities Act grantees to enhance coalition efforts to work with pediatric health care providers and parents to reduce underage drinking, as well as to amplify and enhance the media campaign.

3) Establishes grants to help health care providers decrease underage drinking. Authorizes $3 million per year to assist pediatric medical organizations in educating pediatric health care providers on best practices for screening adolescents for alcohol use, offering brief interventions to discourage drinking, referring to other care when needed, and working with parents.

4) Creates a focus on underage drinking at CDC. Authorizes $5 million per year within CDC to establish a new focus on disseminating and expanding research on population-based strategies to reduce underage drinking, enhancing the use of survey data, and increasing state-level epidemiological surveillance capacity.

5) Compiles data on the effects of drinking on adolescent brain development. Authorizes $500,000 for the National Academy of Sciences to provide a report to Congress on the research regarding the influence of alcohol on adolescent brain development and its public policy implications.

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