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Cornerstone

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### **Lowering the Drinking Age to Eighteen**

A person who has attained the age of maturity specified by law is considered an adult. In the United States, that age of adulthood is eighteen and with every American's eighteenth birthday comes all the rights, provisions, and responsibilities of becoming an adult. Everything is included in becoming an adult except for alcohol consumption. There has been a lot of debate whether or not the drinking age of twenty-one should be lowered to eighteen. "More than 70 percent of teens drink by the time they reach eighteen, and 80 percent of underage college students drink," stated the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (Lowering the drinking age can help promote safer habits). When one turns eighteen, they have the right to vote, join the military, get married, sign contracts, serve on juries, and much more. If an eighteen year old is allowed to do all of the following listed above, why would that same eighteen year old not be allowed to purchase and drink alcohol legally? Although the drinking age is twenty-one, I believe that it should be lowered to eighteen because an eighteen year old is seen as an "adult" in the nation's eyes.

"Why don't we trust these young adults to make the same kind of responsible decisions about alcohol that we believe them capable of making in the voting booth, in the jury box, on the battlefield?" Mark Beckner stated, police chief of Boulder Colorado (The Debate on Lowering the Drinking Age). This is a very good question Beckner brought up. There are over 190

countries within the world and the United States is one of six countries that has a drinking age of twenty-one. The rest of the countries have the drinking age set at either eighteen or younger, some countries do not have drinking age restrictions. If eighteen year olds are responsible enough to make decisions about who is going to lead our country, then they should be allowed to make other decisions about consuming alcohol.

Part of Beckner's jurisdiction is at the University of Colorado, which was recently listed one of the top partying schools in the nation. Beckner encountered many issues among enforcing the underage drinking age. One of which, many minors were to scared to call for medical help if they knew their friend was in danger of alcohol poisoning. The reason why is because many minors felt that they would get into trouble for underage drinking if they called for help. Their passed out friend would then suffer because of the fear of getting ticketed. This problem is encountered by many minors throughout the nation. "The overall advantage is we're not trying to enforce a law that's unenforceable. The abuse of alcohol and the over-consumption of alcohol and DUI driving. Those are the areas we've gotta focus our efforts. Not on chasing kids around trying to give 'em a ticket for having a cup of beer in their hand," stated Beckner (The Debate on Lowering the Drinking Age). When Beckner stated this, we take into consideration that it is more important to enforce over-consumption of alcohol and drinking while driving laws versus ticketing a responsible underage drinker.

Minors should receive full privileges of alcohol consumption but also should be taught about the consequences of drinking alcohol. "We should prepare young adults to make responsible decisions about alcohol in the same way we prepare them to operate a motor vehicle: by first educating and then licensing and permitting them to exercise the full privileges of

adulthood so long as they demonstrate their ability to observe the law,” stated John M McCardell Jr. (Let Them Drink at the the Age of 18, With a Learners Permit). McCardell is the vice-chancellor and president of the University of the South. He believes that it is not efficient for the police force to impose the current drinking age laws. If classes were offered they would teach the minors about alcohol so they could understand the full provisions of what happens when consumed and if consumed to much how to take action. The better the eduction there is about consuming alcohol, the more likely overconsumption would decline.

The current law prohibits anyone under twenty-one to not be able to drink legally, this can create unsupervised drinking which can lead to irresponsible behavior while under the influence of alcohol. If minors are allowed to drink legally, then they could consume alcohol in regulated environments that are supervised. It is very dangerous for minors to be drinking in disguise because bad things could happen that in those circumstances no one has control over. The drinking age restrictions also creates alcohol for the underage as a taboo. Lowering the drinking age would take away the thrill of breaking the law for the minors. This would make alcohol consumption more of a normalized thing for the underage. When lowering the drinking age, our problem of binge drinking would decrease immensely. Not only that, the minors could drink in controlled environment, as mentioned before, versus drinking in disguise where problems are encountered and overconsumption occurs.

Not only has binge drinking been a problem faced by the United states, drinking and driving has also been a major concern with changing the drinking age laws. One of the main reasons why the government raised the drinking age is because they felt it would decrease deaths

in traffic accidents. Many people believe that the decrease in motorized accidents throughout our country is due to the increase in the legal drinking age.

“According to Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, a non-profit organization that works to make America’s roads safer, there were 43,945 motor vehicle-related deaths in 1982, a number that decreased to 43,510 in 2005 and 32,367 in 2011, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration,” (Lower the Drinking Age can help promote Safer Habits). The fatalities due to vehicle-related deaths have decreased a lot within these years. But technology has also become much more innovative which has led to a major decrease in accidents on the road. Not only in the United States have accidents decreased immensely, all other countries with the drinking ages of eighteen or even lower has seen a huge decrease in motorized vehicle accidents as well. “The decrease in drinking and driving problems are the result of many factors and not just the rise in purchase age or the decreased per capita consumption. These include: education concerning drunk driving, designated driver programs, increased seat belt and air bag usage, safer automobiles, lower speed limits, free taxi services from drinking establishments, etc” (Why Drinking Age Should Be Lowered).

Drinking and driving is a serious problem because citizens lives are at risk. The legal blood alcohol content level to drive a car for the United States must be below 0.08. If the concern is driving while intoxicated they should lower the blood alcohol content level. With the United States level being 0.08, drivers could have trouble controlling speed and difficulty processing information and reasoning. Instead of the drinking age being at twenty-one, the government should consider lowering the limit of blood alcohol content level while driving a motorized

vehicle. Drinking and driving is a huge concern throughout but if eighteen year olds are considered an adult they should be able to make those adult decisions.

Every eighteen year old should have the rights to be able to choose whether or not they want to consume alcohol legally. If an eighteen year old is considered an “adult”, then they should receive the full privileges of an adult. Although the drinking age is twenty-one, I believe that it should be lowered to eighteen because an eighteen year is is considered an “adult” in the nation’s eyes. Eighteen is the age of adulthood, let alcohol consumption be apart of the adult decisions that the government knows eighteen year olds are capable of.

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