

Senate Bill 8 – Lowering the age from 18 to 16 Years Old to Handle, Serve and Dispense Alcohol in a Restaurant

USA: Federal States Are Quietly Lowering Alcohol Service Age

<https://movendi.ngo/policy-updates/2023/07/21/usa-federal-states-are-quietly-lowering-alcohol-service-age/>

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States across the country are quietly lowering the alcohol service age

In Federal States across the United States, lawmakers are engaged in a coordinated, corporate-backed campaign to weaken child labor protections. One type of protection – minimum ages to serve alcohol in bars and restaurants – has been eroded in seven states since 2021, as per Economic Policy Institute (EPI). While lowering the age to serve alcohol may sound benign, it is not. It puts young people at risk of sexual harassment, underage drinking, and other harms.

The restaurant industry is already plagued by labor violations. In fact, it is the industry with the highest incidence of child labor law violations. Laws that lower the alcohol service age will subject more young people, at younger ages, to potentially dangerous working conditions at low wages—all in service of employers' pursuit of cheap labor.

The restaurant industry is rife with abuse, including child labor law violations

Teen alcohol service is part of a corporate agenda to cut labor costs and deregulate employment, as per the EPI.

The National Restaurant Association (NRA) – which represents over 100 fast-food and full-service restaurant corporations and has affiliate groups in every state – has long sought to maintain low wages and weak labor standards in the restaurant industry. The NRA has also played a key role in recent efforts to roll back protections for young workers in numerous industries by lobbying in support of bills that extend the hours teens can work, lift restrictions on hazardous work, and eliminate the permitting process for youth work. While the NRA's agenda on child labor is not confined to the restaurant industry, the lobbying organization is particularly focused on eroding protections for young workers in the restaurant industry, including by supporting efforts to lower the age at which young workers can serve alcohol in bars and restaurants.

The restaurant industry is notorious for low wages and benefits and exploitative working conditions, including systemic racial and gender discrimination and rates of sexual harassment that are dramatically higher than in other industries.

At the same time, restaurants are, by far, the worst offenders of child labor laws of any industry and are the largest industry employer of youth. A 2023 analysis by the Food and Environment Reporting Network of U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division data found that nearly two-thirds—64%—of the 16,000 documented child labor violations over the past five years were committed by food service employers. The leisure and hospitality industry, which includes food service employers and restaurants,

has long employed the largest share of teens and young adults of any industry – between one-quarter and one-third of workers these ages.

In recent years, states have ramped up efforts to lower the alcohol service age

Previous EPI research on child labor documented coordinated attempts to roll back child labor protections in 14 states. Four of these 14 states (Iowa, Michigan, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin) have introduced or passed bills related to youth work in the presence of alcohol in 2021–2023.

Since 2021, at least nine states have introduced legislation to lower the alcohol service age. Seven of these states have signed the bills into law. For comparison, it previously took 18 years, from 2003 to 2020, for five states – South Dakota, Delaware, Arizona, North Dakota, and Arkansas – to make changes to youth alcohol service laws.

Recent changes represent an increasingly coordinated effort to roll back protections for young people in the restaurant industry, a trend that does not appear to be slowing.

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Liquor sellers push to lower alcohol serving age to 17

Legal drinking age to remain the same

<https://www.bigrapidsnews.com/local-news/article/Liquor-sellers-push-to-lower-alcohol-serving-age-16698909.php>

By: Kyle Davidson
December 14, 2021

The proposed change would lower the age for serving or selling alcohol from 18 to 17, while the legal age for drinking would remain 21.

As restaurants and bars struggle for staff, the pool of bartenders, servers and liquor sellers could increase with an effort to lower the minimum age requirement to sell and serve alcohol.

The proposed change would lower the age for serving or selling alcohol from 18 to 17, while the legal age for drinking would remain 21.

Even before the pandemic began, Northern Michigan needed service workers. But the pandemic made that need the number one issue for bars and restaurants, said Scott Ellis, the executive director of the Michigan Licensed Beverage Association.

In the Lansing area alone, between 50% and 60% of the association's members are operating at a lesser capacity because they can't get workers, Ellis said.

Lots of restaurants have workers who started when they were 15 or 16, are mature and know the industry, Ellis said. At 17, these workers could wait tables and deliver drinks.

The Michigan Association of Retailers supports the bill sponsored by Rep. Michele Hoytenga, R-Manton. It passed the House 64-39 on Dec. 7 and was referred to the Senate Committee on Regulatory Reform.

While small grocers may have upstanding 17-year-old employees who want to be cashiers, it's difficult to put them in those positions because they can't sell alcohol, said Amy Drumm, the senior vice president of government affairs for the Michigan Retailers Association.

The change would make it easier for retailers to give young workers an opportunity to work in cashier positions without needing to call somebody older to make a sale, Drumm said.

Not everyone agrees with the proposed move.

Some groups argue that 17-year-olds are not responsible enough to sell and serve liquor.

Research suggests that younger sellers are more likely to sell to underage and intoxicated patrons, said Mike Tobias, the executive director of Michigan Alcohol Policy Promoting Health and Safety, a volunteer grassroots organization based in Perry.

"We've done some server training in the past, and some folks talked about it being sometimes a little difficult to say no to an angry customer. So I just think it might be even harder for somebody younger," Tobias said.

The Liquor Control Commission also opposes the change, concerned that allowing 17-year-olds to sell and serve alcohol could create long-term safety concerns.

In a statement in opposition to the bill, the commission noted Michigan's alcohol serving requirements are in line with the majority of other states.

Maine is the only state to allow 17-year-olds to sell and serve alcohol for on-premise consumption at restaurants, bars and tasting rooms, the commission noted. Eighteen other states allow people under 18 to sell alcohol at grocery stores, convenience stores and liquor stores.

Several other states that allow people under 21 to sell and serve alcohol require bartenders to be at least 21, according to the bill's legislative analysis.

Supporters argue the regulations currently in place would prevent illegal sales.

"Liquor licenses are very expensive, and once you have one nobody wants to lose it," said Rep. Roger Hauck, R-Mount Pleasant, who voted in favor of the bill.

Licensees and owners are ultimately responsible for anything that happens on a licensed premise, so they're going to be smart about the maturity of employees when giving them that responsibility, Ellis said.

There are also training programs that teach servers about the laws and the effects of alcohol, which the association would encourage for young servers, Ellis said.

Employers would also have to comply with the Youth Employment Standards Act that limits the number of hours minors can work.

It prevents minors 16 and older from working in areas of business where alcoholic beverages are produced, sold at retail or sold for consumption at an establishments where food is less than 50% of its total earnings.

While measures like compliance checks prevent sales to minors, they have to be consistent, Tobias said.

Michigan Alcohol Policy Promoting Health and Safety is empathetic to the worker shortage, but lowering the seller's age to 17 is not a good solution, Tobias said.

"Everything's looked at through an economic lens, and I know that's important, but I feel like people lose sight of the public health impacts," Tobias said.