

The Minimum Legal Drinking Age

A Data-Based Perspective

Guidance • Support • Prevention • Protection

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Alcohol & Drug Abuse Programs
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Overview

- Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA) History
- Key US Research
- International Perspective & Case Studies
- Research Summary
- Proponents of MLDA-21
- A View from the Frontlines

Objective

Present evidence that supports the minimum legal drinking of 21 and examines the consequences of lowering the drinking age to 18.



History: Minimum Legal Drinking Age

- **1971** – Voting Age lowered to 18 (26th Amendment) setting the stage for lowering the MLDA.
- **1970-1982** – 36 States lowered the MLDA to 18, 19, or 20 (most lowered age to 18)
- **1970** – Research studies began (and continue) to examine the effects of lowering the MLDA.
- **1984** – National Minimum Drinking Age Act
 - Under the Reagan administration the Uniform Drinking Age Act mandated reduced federal transportation funds to states that did not raise the MLDA to 21.

History: Minimum Legal Drinking Age

- **1985** – South Dakota state government challenged the Drinking Age Act
- **1987** – Supreme Court rules Act constitutional
 - States retain the right to set drinking ages, but the federal government can impose a 10% penalty on highway funds if the MLDA is under 21
- **1988** – All states have adopted 21 as the MLDA
- **1995** – Federal Zero Tolerance Law for those under 21

Key US Research & Data

- The MLDA is the most well-studied alcohol policy in the US.
- *“Scientists began studying the effects of the lowered MLDA, focusing particularly on the incidence of motor vehicle crashes, the leading cause of death among teenagers. Several studies in the 1970’s found that motor vehicle crashes increased significantly among teens when the MLDA was lowered. With evidence that a lower drinking age resulted in more traffic injuries and fatalities among youth, citizen advocacy groups pressured states to restore the MLDA to 21.”*

Source: American Medical Association www.ama-assn.org

Key US Research & Data

- Compared to states with MLDA 21, those states that lowered the MLDA to 18 reported significantly more:
 - Alcohol-related crashes
 - Alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities
 - Alcohol-related property crime in 15-20 year olds
- But there was little to no increase among 21+.

Key US Research & Data

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Data
 - In 1982 60% of traffic fatalities were alcohol related
 - In 2005 39% of traffic fatalities were alcohol related
 - 75% of traffic fatalities that occur between midnight and 3am are alcohol related.
- NOTE: MLDA-21 is not the only variable (shift in demographics, increased enforcement, increased seat belt use, safer cars, increased parental monitoring and “designated driver” emphasis)

Cash Value of Underage Drinking

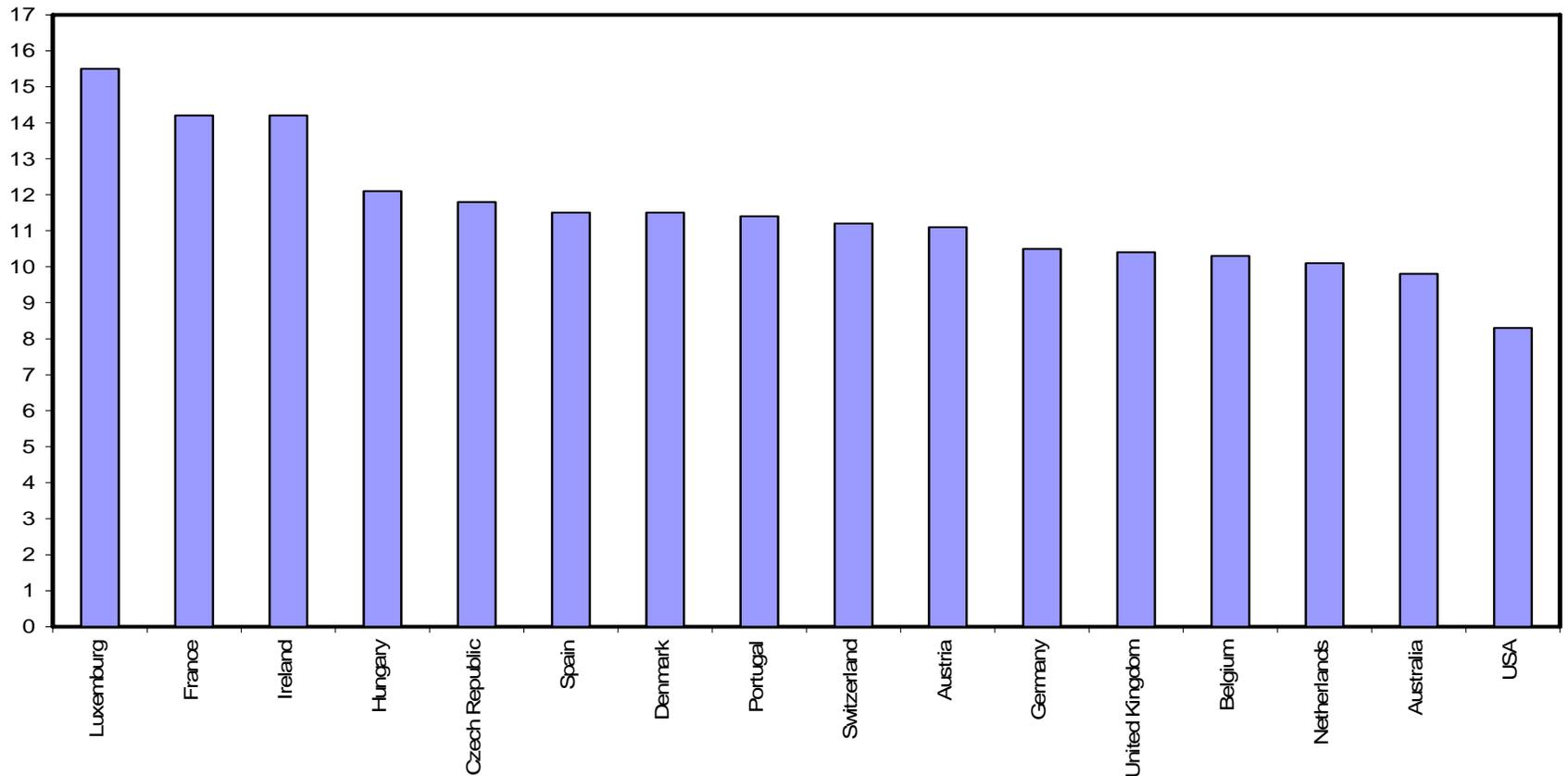
- Ages 12-20
- \$22.5 billion
- 17.5% of total consumer expenditures for alcohol in the US in 2001
- Foster et al. (2006)

International Research

Understanding the global perspective

International Consumption

Alcohol Consumption 2005 (Liters/Capita)

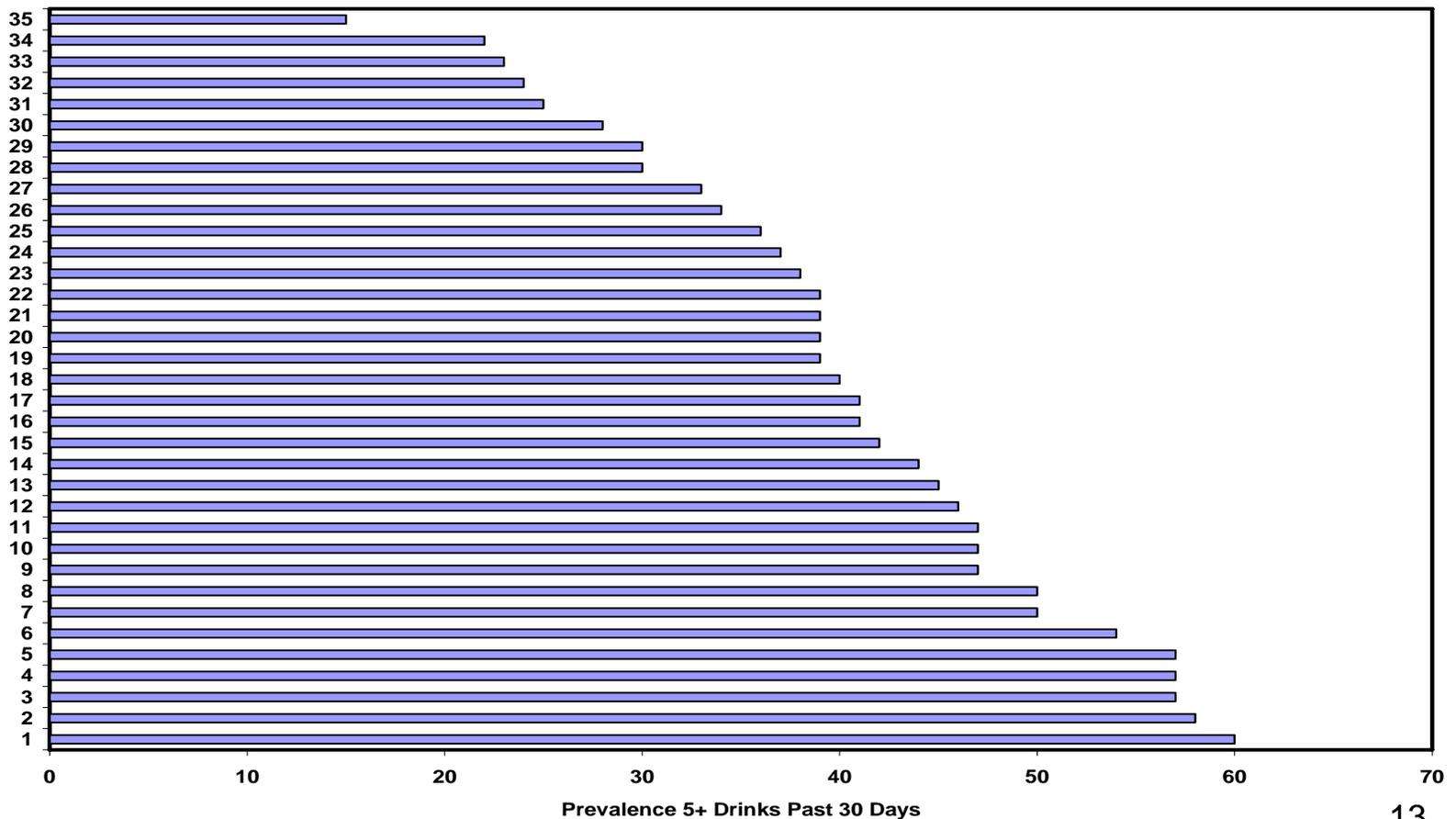


What Does this Mean?

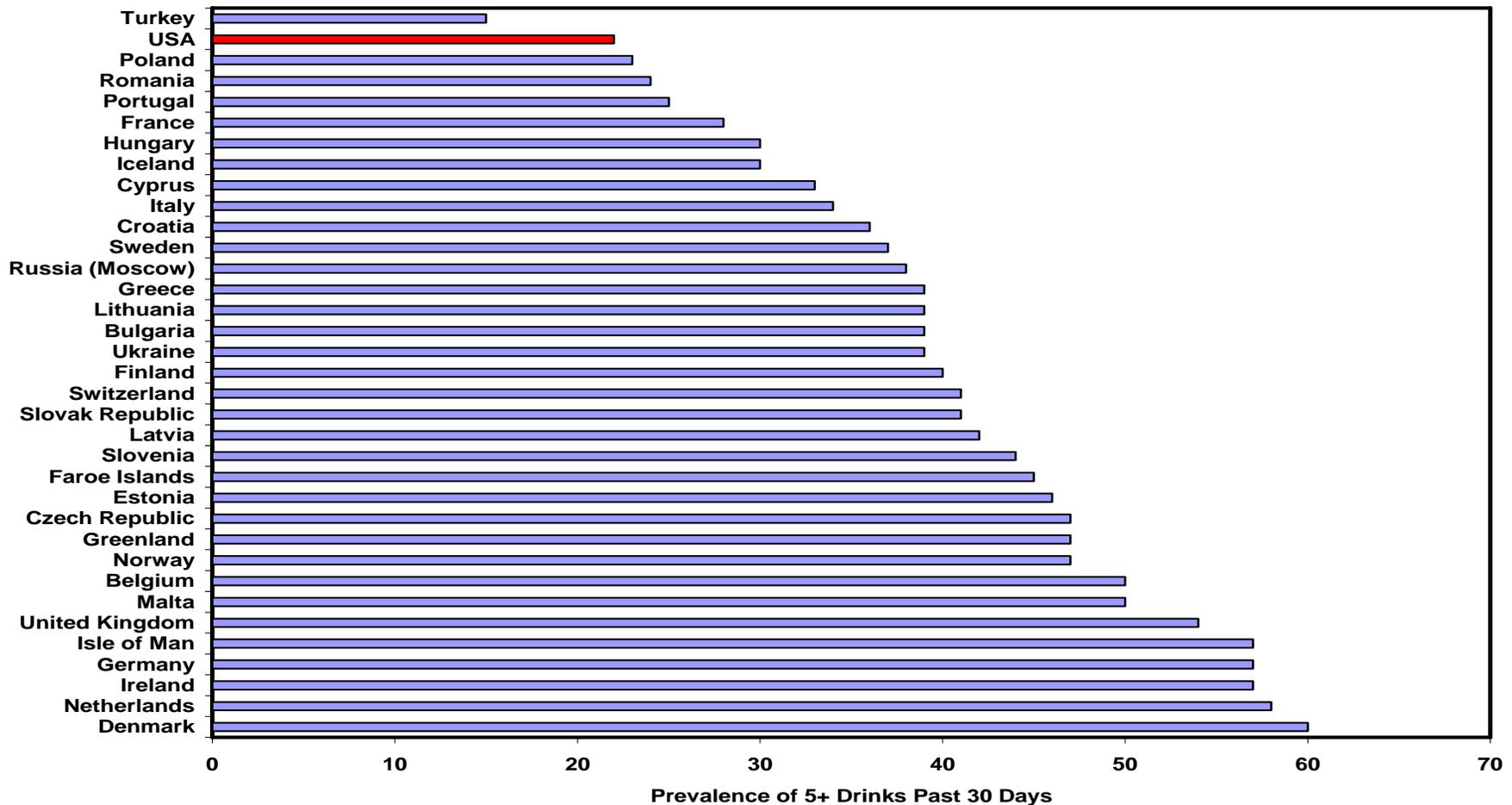
- **Per capita consumption of alcohol is the most reliable measure of a population's overall alcohol-drinking behaviors**
 - Source: Medical Studies/Trials – (Published: 11/16/04) comment on Kerr et al. (2004) in *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*

International Perspective on Binge Drinking

Where does the United States fall among the 35 represented countries?

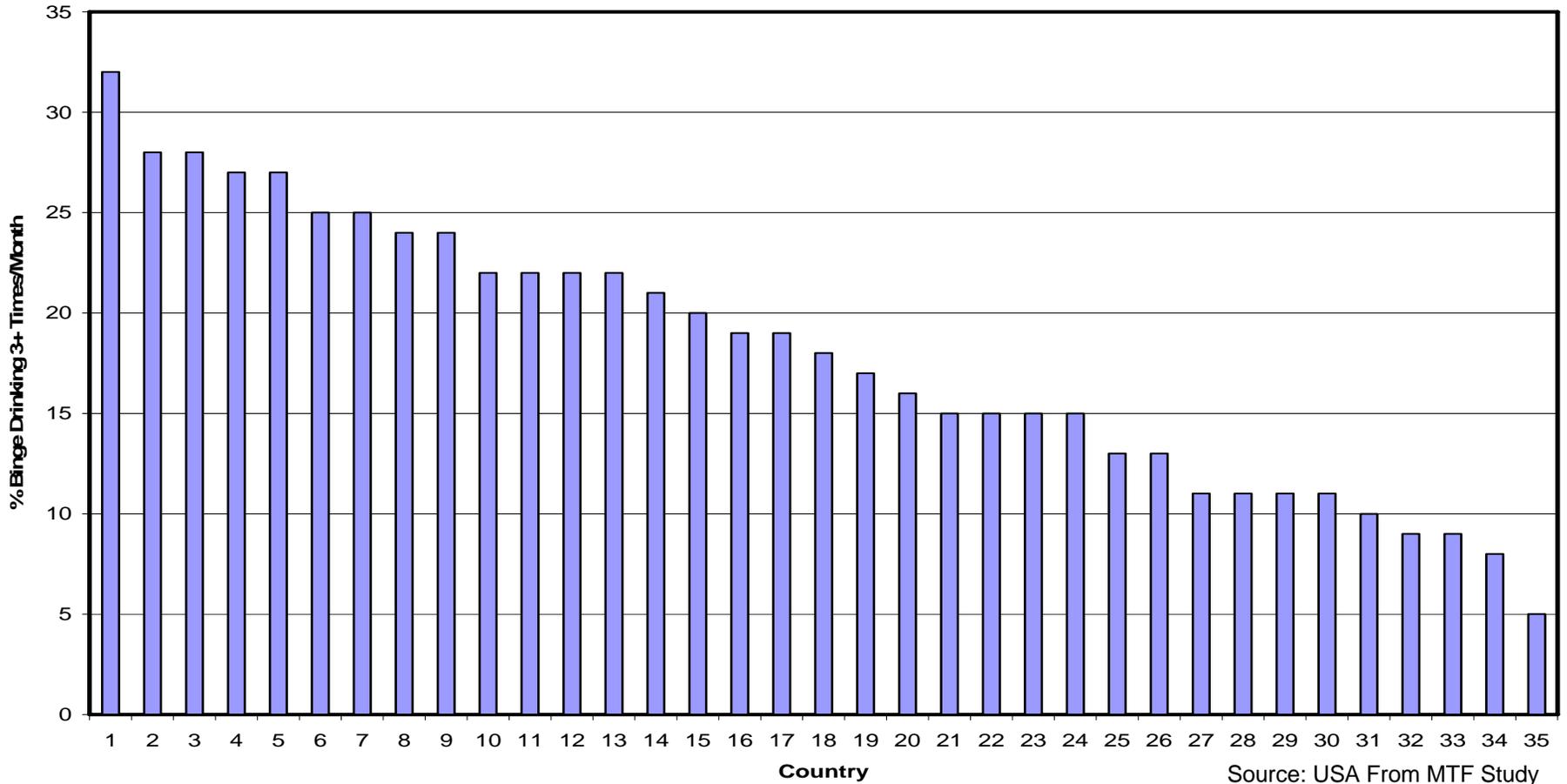


International Perspective Binge Drinking



International Data

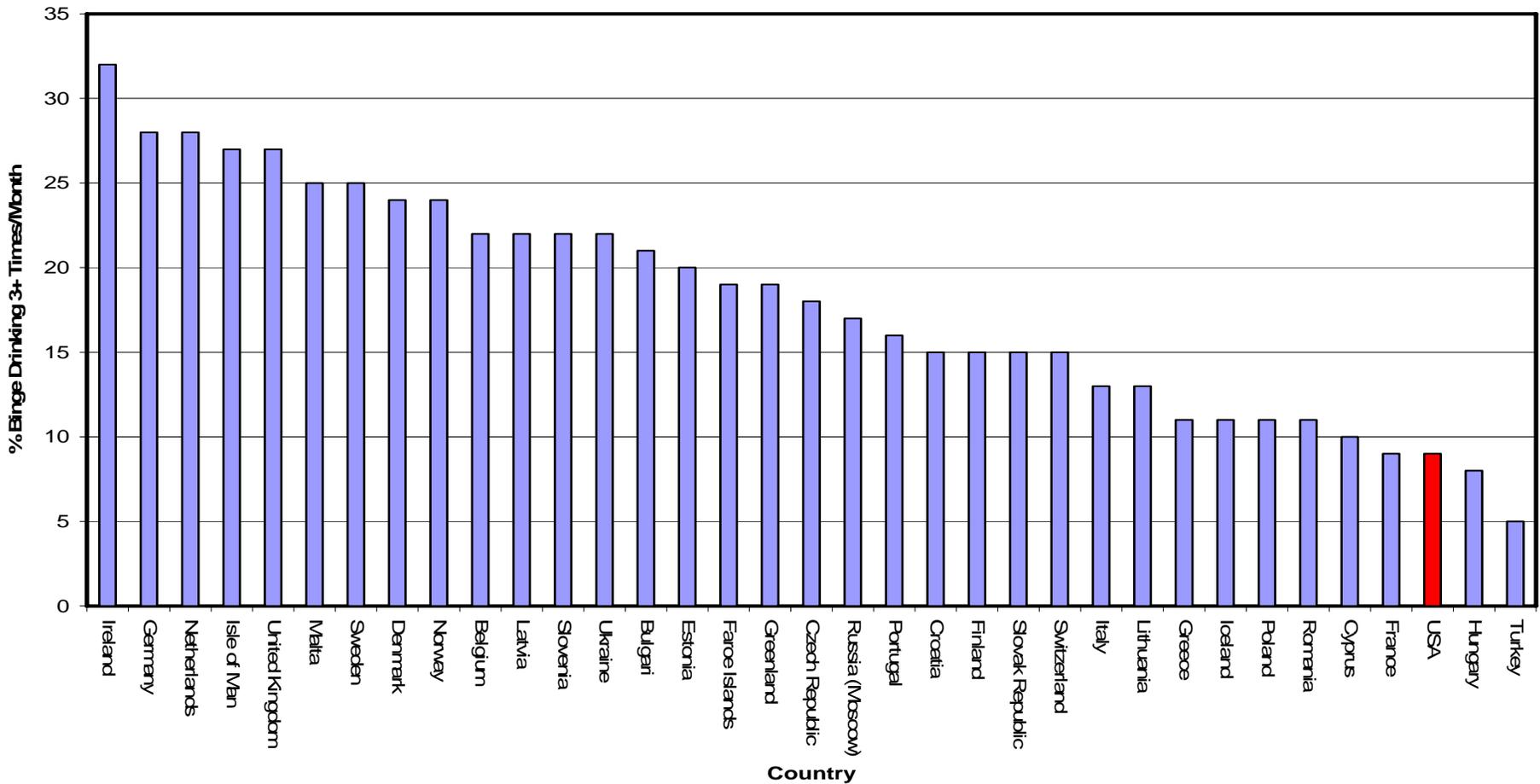
European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs



Source: USA From MTF Study

International Data

European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs



CASE STUDY: Increased Access

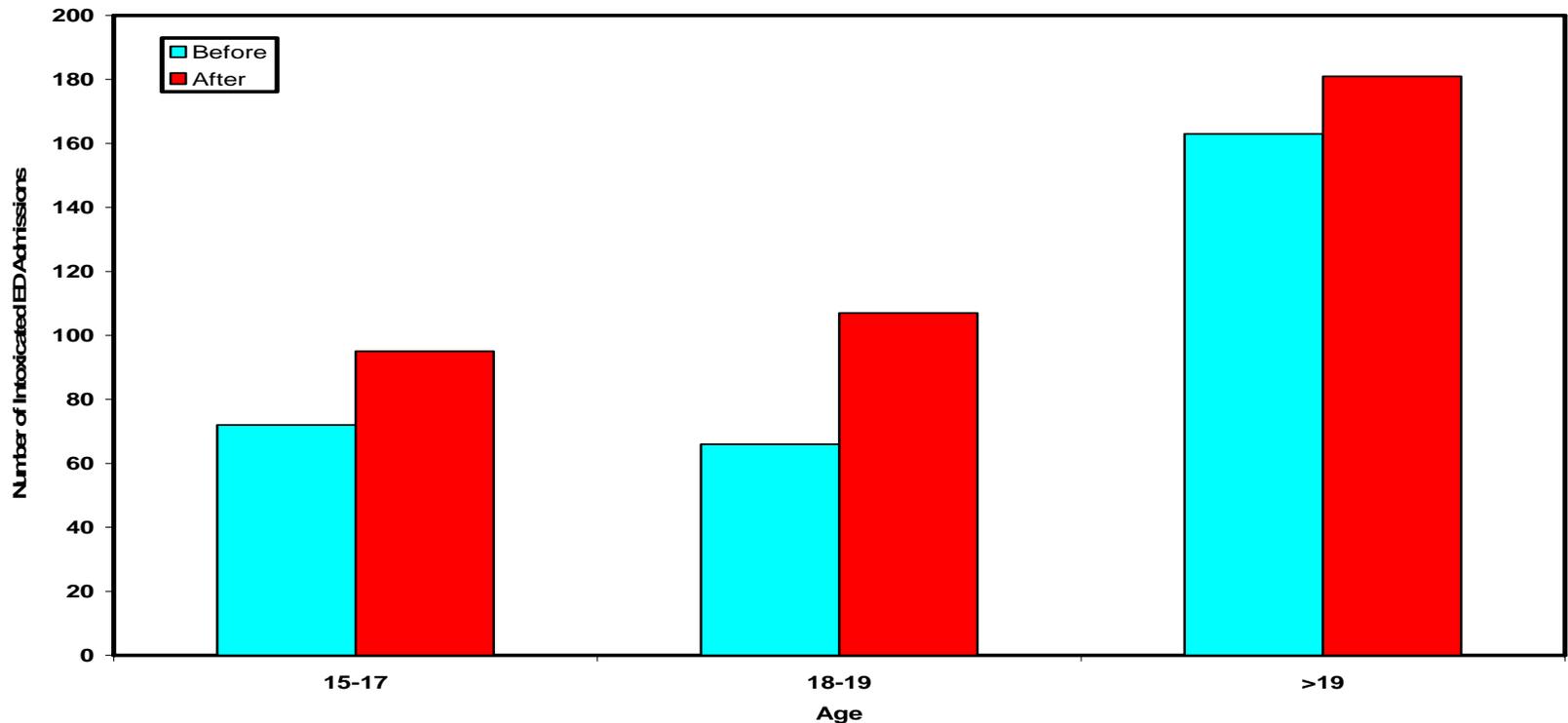
- In January, 2004 the Finnish government alcohol monopoly ALKO cut taxes on alcoholic beverages by 33%.
- ALKO retail sales in March, 2004 were 50% higher than March 2003.
- 18% increase in measured consumption of alcohol after 12 months, among ALL age groups.
- 17% increase in alcohol-related deaths.
- As of September, 2007, alcohol is the leading cause of death in Finland, surpassing heart disease for the first time. (Source: Koski et al. 2007)

CASE STUDY: New Zealand's MLDA

- In 1999 New Zealand lowered the MLPA/MLDA from 20 to 18.
- This resulted in a “natural” experiment that allowed comparisons of relevant variables for specific age groups before and after the MLDA was lowered.
- Unsuccessful attempts have been made to reinstate a higher drinking age.

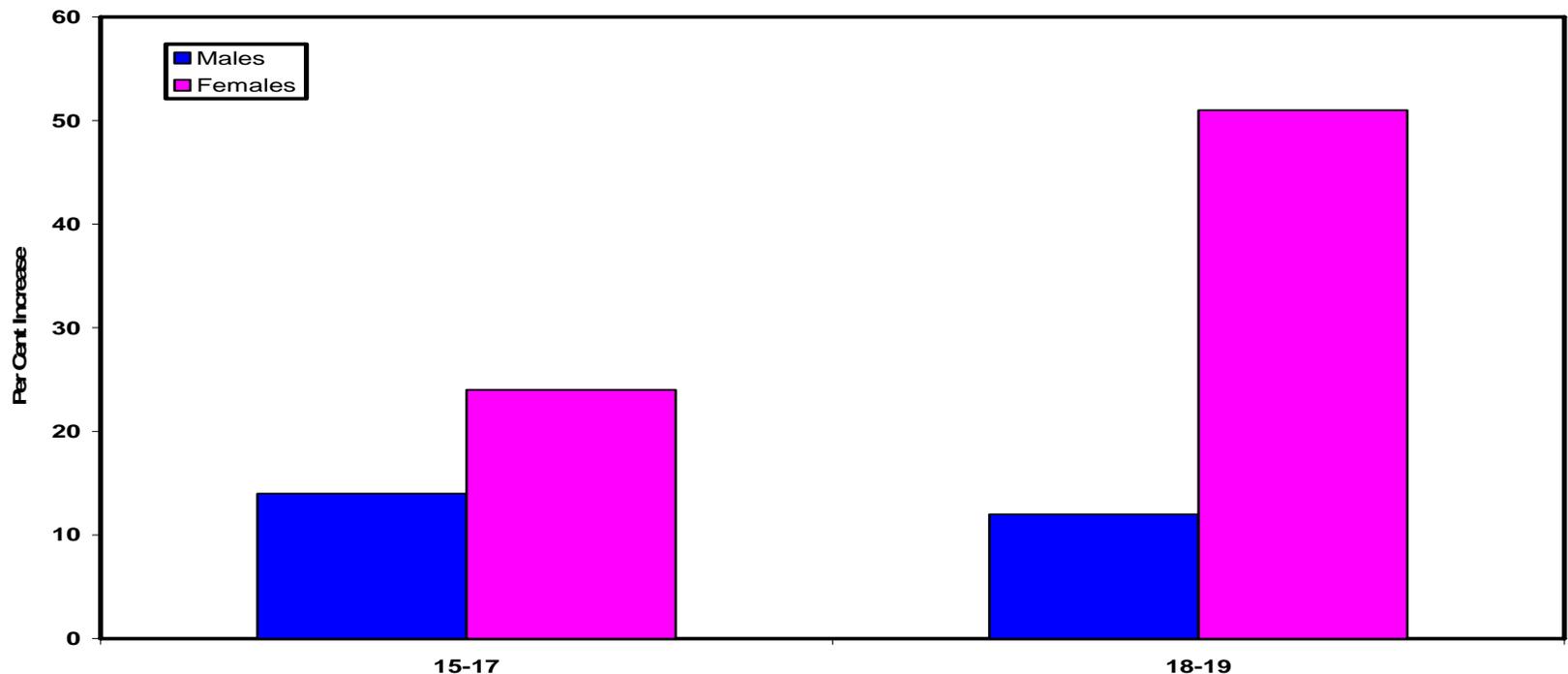
CASE STUDY: New Zealand's MLDA

Effect of Lowering Drinking Age from 20 to 18 on ED Admissions



CASE STUDY: New Zealand's MLDA

Change in % of Alcohol Involved Crash Injuries After Lowering Drinking Age to 18 (Relative to 20-24 year olds)



CASE STUDY: New Zealand's MLDA

- *“No traffic safety policy, with the possible exception of motorcycle safety helmet laws, has more evidence for its effectiveness than do the minimum legal drinking age laws.”*
 - Source: Kypri, Voas, Langley, Stephenson, Begg, Tippetts, & Davie (2006) Minimum Purchasing Age for Alcohol and Traffic Crash Injuries Among 15- to 19-Year-Olds in New Zealand. American Journal of Public Health, 96, 126-131.

Research Summary

Lessons Learned from US &
International Data

Research Summary

- US has the highest MLDA in the West and one of the lowest prevalence rates of adolescent drinking in the West.
- Increasing access to alcohol (including lowering the drinking age) results in overall negative consequences for both individuals and society. (New Zealand, Finland, US).
 - Early alcohol access increases traffic accidents and fatalities
 - Early access increases other alcohol related harms
 - Early heavy drinking can be an indicator for alcohol problems in adulthood

Research Summary

- There are virtually NO reports of reductions in alcohol-related harms in 18-20 year olds when the MLDA is lowered.
- MLDA-21 does not prevent underage drinking, but research has shown that there is less consumption and less alcohol-related injuries among adolescents and young adults.
- This is a Public Health Issue that affects the health and well being of adolescents.

Proponents of MLDA-21

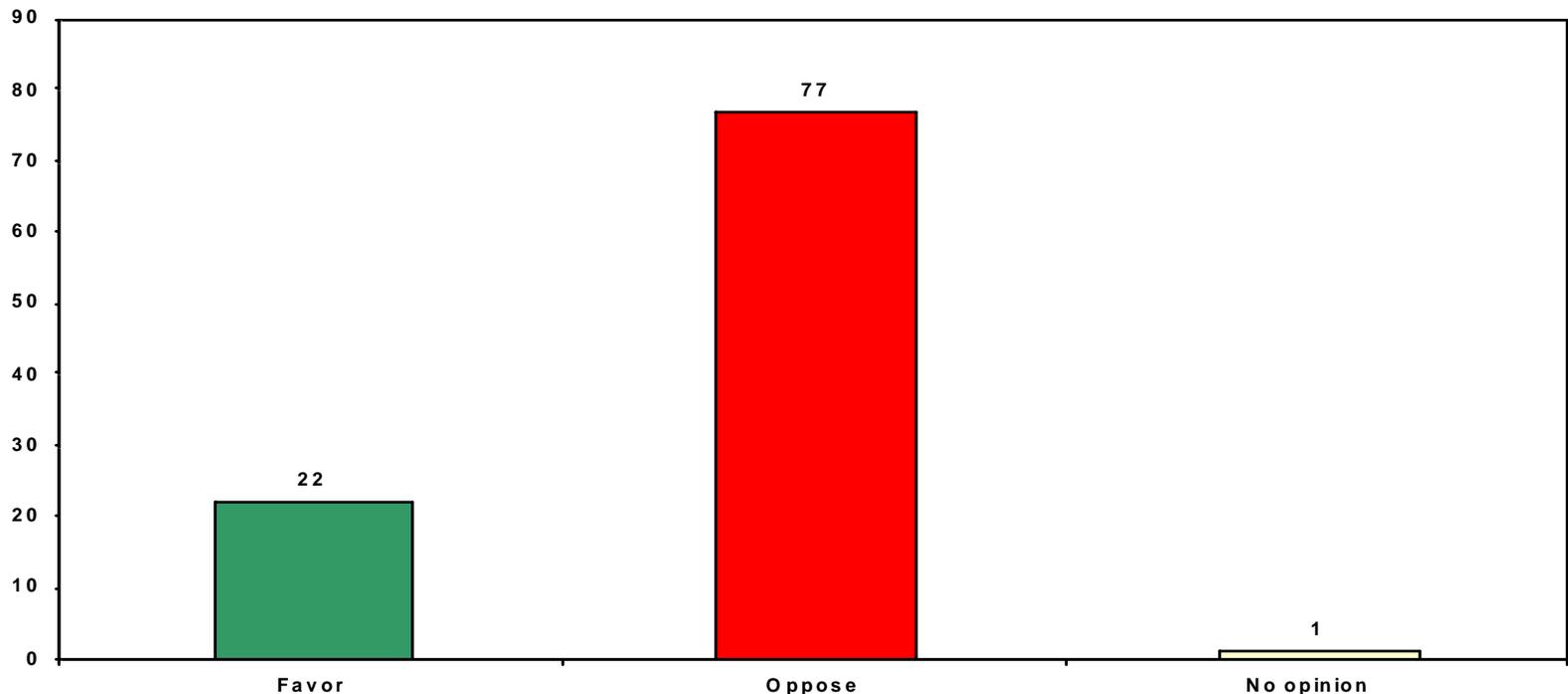
The most well-studied alcohol policy in
the United States

Proponents of MLDA-21

- MADD (Mother's Against Drunk Driving)
- National Safety Council
- National Transportation Safety Board
- American Medical Association (AMA)
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety
- Governor's Highway Safety Administration

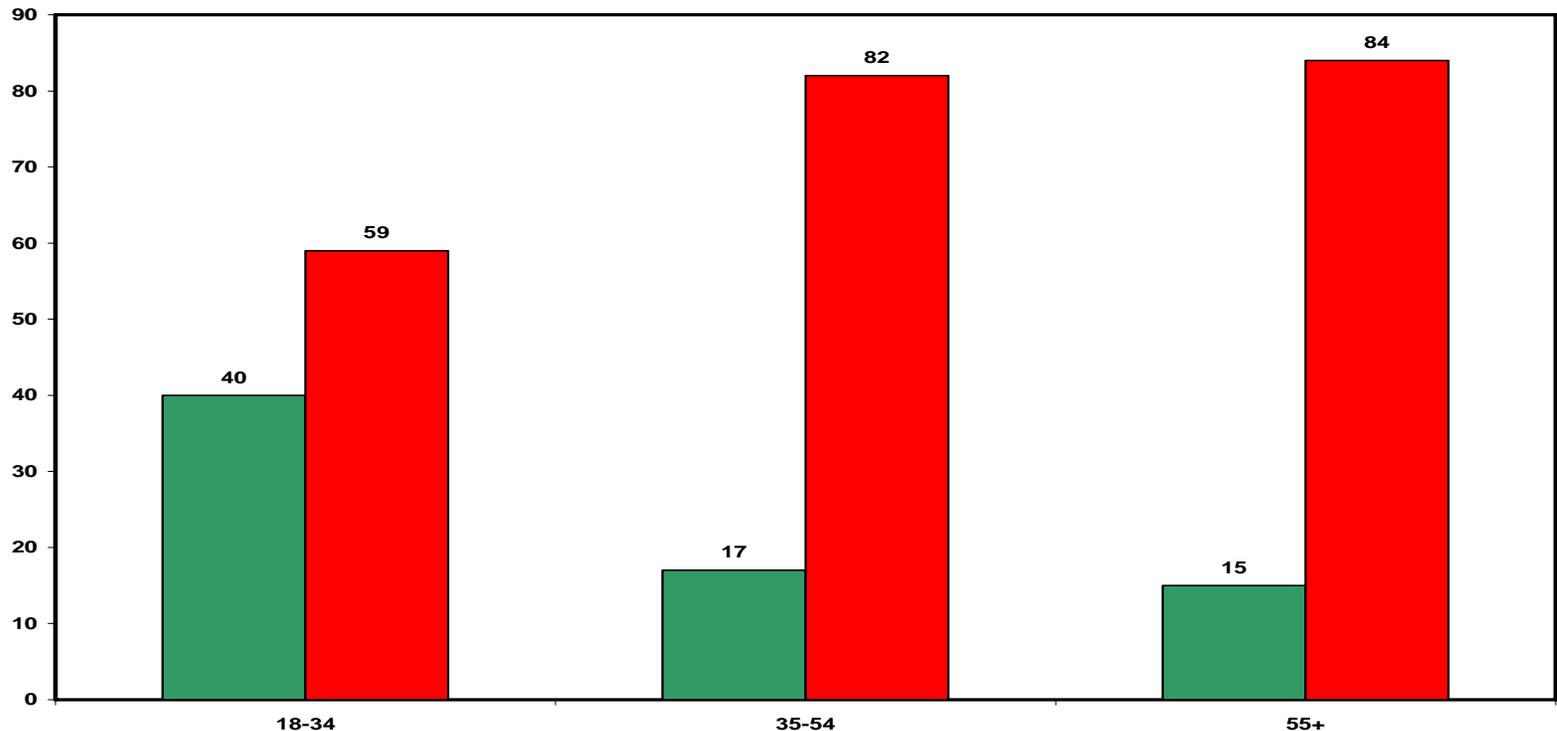
National Opinions

Would You Favor or Oppose a Federal Law that Would Lower the Drinking Age in All States to 18?



National Opinions

Would You Favor or Oppose a Federal Law that Would Lower the Drinking Age in All States to 18?



Contact Information

- Add your information here

A Personal View From the Frontlines

by Steve Waldo
Department of Liquor Control

A Personal View From the Frontlines

“As to the idea of lowering the drinking age from 21 to 18, I couldn’t think of a more ill-conceived plan. By way of my background, I have been a law enforcement officer for the past 37 years in local, county, state and federal governments.”

A Personal View From the Frontlines

“I have been an investigator for the Vermont Department of Liquor Control for the past 26 years and have conducted many investigations into the deaths of young Vermonter’s. More than I care to remember; some that I even knew before the crash. Since my job has required me to work nights and weekends, I often found myself assisting the police in dragging the dead teen (or teens) out of the crash wreckage. That little chore grows tiresome rather quickly. I can not remember any crash that did not involve alcohol.”

A Personal View From the Frontlines

“I can also say that prior to my employ with the VT Liquor Control, I was the Chief of Police in Ludlow, Vermont. Being a small department, I worked the road, answering calls in addition to my chief duties. I have been on the front lines while the drinking age was 18 and while it was 21. I’m not certain whether it is fortunate or unfortunate that I remember with clarity how it was during MLDA 18. It certainly appears that some have amnesia regarding that time frame.”

A Personal View From the Frontlines

“The current day young people are certainly excused since they were not alive back then, but the folks my age have no excuse. When the drinking age was 18 I remember clearly all the bars that sprang up along the Vermont border with New Hampshire. They (New Hampshire) raised their age quickly. Vermont held back and was one of the last ones to raise the age to 21 in the 1980’s. That little bit of Vermont style independence created a haven for 18, 19 and 20 year old drinkers.”

A Personal View From the Frontlines

“Since at that time I was an Investigator for the Liquor Control Board here in Vermont, I was tasked with inspecting those drinking establishments. Many of the underage drinkers (15, 16, and 17 year olds) that I arrested in those bars were from New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Maine. Some driving for 4 or more hours to get to the Vermont nightclubs. I also remember with clarity, all the Seniors who were showing up for high school classes in an intoxicated state. They could drink legally, (since half the class was now 18) so why not? I also remember how easy it was for Juniors and Sophomores, and Freshmen to obtain alcohol through their upper classmen.”

A Personal View From the Frontlines

“The age of attendees at the gravel pit parties was as low as 13 and 14. Wait, I thought that if the drinking age was lowered, the 18, 19 and 20 year olds wouldn’t drink there, they would be in the bars? Actually, alcohol in bars is expensive. Teens are very price sensitive and will more often purchase alcohol from a retail outlet and drink it with their buddies in places other than licensed establishments. Plus, if you have the party in a gravel pit, no one asks for ID, so you can drink with your underage classmates.”

A Personal View From the Frontlines

“I want all those supporters of the MLDA-18 philosophy to know that they will be taking a ride with me should they be successful in dropping the drinking age. We will be going to the home of the teen who has just been killed in a drunk driving crash. They will get to meet that teen’s parents and look them in the eyes. They will then break the news to those parents that their son or daughter has just been killed and won’t be coming home. The supporters will forever understand just how horrific it is for a parent to lose a child. There is no more distasteful duty for a police officer. Absolutely none.”

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