



States are raising legal drinking ages

By Michelle Carr

If statistics are any indication, a national trend may be developing to raise legal drinking ages.

In 1979, four states raised their legal drinking ages, according to Barbara Koch, legislative aide for Sen. Ralph Kelly of Grand Island, who is sponsoring legislation aimed at raising the age in Nebraska from 19 to 21.

Two of the four states, New Jersey and Tennessee, raised drinking ages from 18 to 19. Massachusetts raised its age from 18 to 20.

Illinois also raised its drinking age, but before the law change, a "home rule law" allowed each municipality to determine its own drinking age, Koch said. Now, the state has a uniform law of age 21 for drinking alcoholic beverages, she added.

In 1978 Iowa and Michigan raised their drinking ages. Iowa raised the age from 18 to 19 and Michigan, from 18 to 21.

Koch said that several states are considering legislation to raise the legal drinking age. A bill was introduced in the Kansas Legislature to raise the age for purchasing 3.2 beer to 21, she said.

Koch, who has been researching statistics for LB221, said there is "definitely" a trend developing of states raising the drinking age.

No state has reduced the legal drinking age since 1975, Koch said, and 10 states have raised their drinking ages since 1976. Currently, 25 states have a 21-age law, 11 states have an 18-age law and 11 states have a 19-age law.

Four states attempted to lower the legal drinking age but failed. Missouri tried to lower the age from 21 to 18. Oregon attempted to reduce the age from 21 to 18 and later to 19. Iowa tried to lower the age from 19 to 18 and North Dakota tried to change the drinking age from 21 to 19.

Of the 25 states which have a drinking age of 21, 11 have a lower restriction for beer or wine or both. Three of the 25 states have an 18-age law for the purchase of 3.2 beer and seven states allow 18-year-olds to purchase beer and wine.

Currently, four states that border Nebraska have 21 as the legal drinking age. Those states are Colorado, Kansas, Missouri and South Dakota. Missouri is the only border state that requires a person to be 21 to purchase all types of alcoholic beverages. Iowa and Wyoming require persons to be 19 to purchase alcohol. Wyoming changed its drinking age from 21 to 19 in 1973.

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