

Arizona lawmaker wants to lower alcohol serving age to 18

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A state lawmaker wants to allow change the legal age of serving alcohol from 19 to 18. (Source: 3TV/CBS 5)



Unlike many states, Arizona does not set different age restrictions for servers and bartenders. (Source: 3TV/CBS 5)



The bill's supporter said 18-year-olds are often unable to land server jobs because of the alcohol age restriction. (Source: 3TV/CBS 5)

CHANDLER, AZ (3TV/CBS 5) -

An Arizona state lawmaker has introduced legislation that would allow 18-year-olds to serve alcohol at restaurants and bars.

[The bill](#), introduced by State Rep. Jeff Weninger (R-Chandler), would lower the minimum age from 19 to 18 for both servers and bartenders. The bill does not change the legal drinking age of 21.

“I don't believe in precluding 18-year-olds – who are a legal adult, who can serve in the military – from being able to support themselves waiting tables,” he said.

Weninger owns an Italian restaurant in Chandler and a deli with three Valley locations. He said 18-year-olds are often unable to land server jobs because of the alcohol age restriction.

“Most businesses, in this day and age with efficiencies, aren't going to have people running drinks” for younger servers, he said.

Steve Chucri, president of the Arizona Restaurant Association, said his organization supports the bill.

“I think this move from 19 to 18 basically opens up a larger field of opportunity for young individuals wanting to get into the workforce,” he said. “I don't think that magical age of 18 to 19 somehow brings about a lot of maturity, or going from 19 to 18 brings about adolescence.”

But some industry insiders said they were uncomfortable with the idea of putting alcohol in the hands of 18-year-olds.

“People that aren't 21, do they really know what someone looks like when they're impaired?” said Sheryl Willis, a former pub owner in Chandler.

Willis said Arizona already has lax liquor laws, including no mandatory alcohol training for servers.

“Even the health board requires anyone who's delivering food at any age to pass a test and have current certification,” she said. “The liquor board does nothing like that.”

Unlike many states, Arizona does not set different age restrictions for servers and bartenders. Twenty states require that bartenders be at least 21 years old; however, 17 of those states allow people to serve alcohol at a younger age.

Willis said she is more comfortable allowing teens to place drinks on a table at a restaurant but doesn't like the idea of people under 21 working the bar.

[According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#), the majority of states, 37, set their minimum serving age at 18. Arizona is one of nine states where the minimum age is 19. Three states have a minimum serving age of 21. Only Maine sets their minimum age to both bartend and serve alcohol at 17.

Only two states have adjusted their minimum alcohol serving ages since 2003. Arkansas changed the minimum age to serve from 21 to 19 in 2003. North Dakota changed its minimum serving age from 19 to 18 in 2009. Both states kept the minimum bartending age at 21.

[HB 2047](#) would also affect alcohol sales in grocery stores, Weninger said. Currently, teens as young as 16 can ring up an alcohol purchase at the register if they are supervised by a 19-year-old. The bill would change the minimum supervision age to 18.

The bill is set for a [hearing before the House Commerce Committee](#) on Jan. 24.