

# Deseret News

## My view: Change alcohol barrier? Utah shouldn't mess with success

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*Rick Bowmer, Associated Press*

*In this Feb. 10, 2017, file photo, Market Street Grill server Colton Prestwich works behind the so-called "Zion Curtain" in Salt Lake City. A Utah lawmaker is unveiling a proposal overhauling liquor laws and allowing restaurants to get rid of the barriers but in exchange require a type of buffer zone around bars or areas where drinks are prepared. The buffer zones would have to be 10 feet from the rest of the dining room or a waiting area and walled off and be off limits to anyone under 21 years old.*

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The Utah Legislature is considering removing separate alcohol-preparation areas in restaurants in response to concerns that alcohol barriers are hurting

business and tourism. In reality, Utah business and tourism are the envy of the nation.

For six of the last seven years, the state of Utah has been named by Forbes as the [No. 1 best state](#) for business. Fodor's Travel, a leading travel authority for 80 years, recently named Utah as the [No. 1 travel destination](#) in the world.

Utah's underage drinking rate is the [lowest](#) in the nation and has [dropped](#) dramatically over the last decade. As [David Jernigan](#), director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said, Utah should not "mess with success."

Utah has [more children](#) per capita than any other state. Our children are our most valuable resource and investment. In a culture where alcohol is consumed by adults, separate alcohol-preparation areas in restaurants are one way Utah puts children first. Alcohol-preparation barriers shield children from the glamour of bartending and help shape their perceptions of alcohol. The alcohol barrier is the compromise for allowing bars in restaurants. It is a visual cue that teaches children that alcohol is different from soft drinks or coffee and must be treated with more care and caution. Children's brains think [concretely](#) and 80 percent of their learning happens [visually](#). A visual barrier creates context in real time, teaching children in precisely the way their brains are hard-wired to learn. The "Zion curtain" is not "quirky." It is effective. Children learn how to treat alcohol by observing how adults treat alcohol.

Correct alcohol messaging is critical because the consequences of underage drinking are pervasive and devastating. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), "alcohol is the most commonly used and abused drug among youth." Nationwide, more teens [die](#) from alcohol abuse than from all other illegal drugs combined. Over one-third of teen [traffic](#) deaths

are alcohol-related. Study after study links underage drinking to [brain damage](#), alcohol [dependence](#) and [illicit drug](#) use.

Unlike adults, teens don't drink socially; they [binge](#) drink. They drink to get drunk. Although Utah has fewer teen drinkers than in other states, those who do drink start drinking [earlier](#) and binge drink [more](#) than kids in other states. With about [38,000](#) underage users each year, alcohol is still the [most](#) abused substance by Utah teens.

In addition, alcohol is the most common [date rape](#) drug, putting youths at risk for [sexual assault](#). When either the perpetrator or victim (or both) are intoxicated, sexual assault can be brutal and life-shattering. In a recent Utah legislative committee hearing, many young people told heart-wrenching stories of being sexually assaulted. The hearing was focused on sex education in schools, but many of the stories involved alcohol. One college freshman who had consumed alcohol at a fraternity party woke up the next day in pain, "beaten up badly" and raped.

Tragically, this student is not alone. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reports, "perhaps greater than [97,000](#) students between the ages of 18 and 24 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape each year." Clearly, if we want to address sexual assault we must address underage drinking. All the sex education in the world won't protect young people from sexual assault when they are drunk.

The state of Utah is [legally bound](#) to "promote the reduction of the harmful effects of ... consumption of alcoholic products by minors." We do that by either putting a fence at the top of the cliff or more ambulances at the bottom. Alcohol barriers in restaurants are part of our fence at the top of the cliff to prevent underage drinking and should not be removed without a compelling reason.

Utah, the state with the most children per capita, should maintain separate alcohol- preparation areas in restaurants as part of a culture that allows business and tourism to flourish while putting children first — making Utah the envy of the nation.

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