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Minors targeted by Miss. fake ID law

Using a fake ID to buy alcoholic beverages soon could bring fine, community service

KATHLEEN BAYDALA • KBAYDALA@CLARIONLEDGER.COM • APRIL 8, 2009

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Come July, minors caught trying to buy liquor, beer or wine with any kind of fake ID could face up to a \$500 fine and 30 days of community service.

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While it long has been a misdemeanor in Mississippi for people younger than 21 to present fake driver's licenses to purchase alcohol, Senate Bill 2616

attempts to close a loophole by making it a crime to present any kind of false identification, including student or military IDs.

While there wasn't a specific event or study that prompted the change, bill co-sponsor Sen. Bob Dearing, D-Natchez, said he and fellow lawmakers just believed it was time to address the loophole.

"Hopefully, it will curtail the underage drinking and purchasing of alcohol, especially beer, with any kind of fake ID," he said.

Sen. Dean Kirby, R-Pearl, signed on to the legislation once it was brought to him last year by the State Tax Commission, which includes the Office of Alcoholic Beverage Control.

"I think they'd had several complaints (of minors using fake documents) from law enforcement," Kirby said.

Minors using fake IDs is becoming a real problem in Mississippi, State Tax Commission spokeswoman Kathy Waterbury said.

"In 2006, about 25 percent of the ABC's arrests were people who had fake IDs," Waterbury said. "ABC agents also ran a detail from October to December 2008 and over 52 percent of the arrests were for fake ID."

Davis Dodson, a 19-year-old sophomore at Mississippi State University, said he believes

underage drinking is "very prevalent" in a college setting.

"Usually, students use someone else's ID" to buy alcohol, he said.

Waterbury said ABC's arrests back up Dodson's assumption. The most prevalent abuse of false documents does not involve counterfeit licenses or altered ID cards but rather minors using IDs borrowed from of-age friends or family, she said.

But Dodson said he doesn't think the new legislation will do much to deter that.

"I don't know how much the law changes things," he said. "(Getting charged) is definitely a risk, but it's a risk most people take."

University of Mississippi junior Carmen Bouldin, 20, from Tupelo, said she thinks underage drinkers will continue to find ways to get alcohol.

"I don't think anyone would want to pay \$500 or do community service just for alcohol," Bouldin said. "I think most people will just get their friends to buy it like they're doing now."

Enforcement of the law will be the responsibility of ABC, other state law enforcement agencies and places where alcoholic beverages are sold.

"We have agents who work with retailers. They look like an employee in the shop and question people who look underage," Waterbury said.

For stores or restaurants, enforcement is straight-forward: ask buyers for their IDs and refuse to sell to anyone who isn't old enough or who shows false identification. Even if a retailer suspects an ID may be fake, he can refuse the sale.

"Under the law, we turn anyone away for whatever reason," said Perry Launius, assistant manager of Wine & Spirits in the Quarter, located on Lakeland Drive in Jackson.

The change in legislation garnered praise from the Mississippi Hospitality Beverage Association, an organization that represents sellers of wine and spirits.

The association's president, Kathy McDade, said the new legislation gives alcohol purveyors "backup."

"If we sell to underage people, we get fined and our permits are in danger, so we feel it should also be against the law for (minors) to come in and try to buy with fake IDs," she said. "They shouldn't be allowed to have them or to try to purchase alcohol."

Launius said there is too much at stake for a business not to comply with the law.

"It's not worth it," he said. "There's no way for it to be worth it."

Philip Cortese, 22, of Lafayette, La., and Vanessa Johnson, 22, of Greenville said they have

never used a fake ID to purchase alcohol and have never heard of anyone using anything besides a fake driver's license.

"I don't know many people faking passports to buy alcohol," Cortese said.

Staff writer Nicklaus Lovelady and Oxford correspondent Paul P. Quinn contributed to this report.

To comment on this story, call Kathleen Baydala at (601) 961-7262.
