

# WHISKEY RAIDERS

## ‘Unforgivable That it Would Sell Students to Budweiser For Pocket Change’: Controversial Bill Seeks to Legalize Booze Ads Targeted at Minors in This State

Cynthia Mersten Aug 28th, 2023



Measure AB 840 is being championed by California state universities. The bill would allow big booze brands to pay for advertising space in campus venues, potentially advertising alcohol to underage students. (Photo: AP Photo/Thomas Unterberger)

California state universities like Cal Poly San Louis Obispo are pushing for a revenue opportunity that may raise a few eyebrows: At the behest of big alcohol, these schools are advocating to be allowed to sell space for alcohol brands to advertise in recreational facilities used by undergraduates, [Alcohol Justice](#) claimed in a news release published [Friday](#).

Cal Poly San Louis Obispo, St. Mary’s College of California and seven other California State University campuses are pushing a Democratically led bill, [AB 840](#). The bill, written by Democratic Assemblymember Dawn Addis, will give universities additional access to funds through revenue gained from selling advertising space in large venues on campus to big booze brands looking to hawk their wares.

*“Operating budgets are always tight. Sponsorships with local alcoholic beverage suppliers and manufacturers based in part on advertising opportunities... provide hundreds of thousands of discretionary dollars,” Cal Poly Assistant VP of Strategic Business Services Dru Zackmeyer said as an explanation for championing the bill, according to Alcohol Justice.*

The proposed bill is an unorthodox way for universities to earn revenue, to say the least — especially since 97,000 sexual assaults among American college students involve alcohol on an annual basis, according to the [National Center for Drug Abuse](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [claims](#) underage drinking is a common issue in the U.S. that can lead to school and legal problems, motor vehicle crashes and increased risks of suicide and homicide.

*“Alcohol ads are not neutral,” Alcohol Justice Executive Director Cruz Avila said. “They are meant to persuade, and they don’t ID someone before they persuade them. As a father who has studied and researched the consequences of reckless drinking on underage Californians, it’s unforgivable that a school would sell its students to Budweiser for pocket change.”*

The effectiveness of the new measure was questioned by the California Assembly Appropriations Committee according to the release. According to the committee, annual revenue would be “potentially in the low millions.”

The Legislative Analyst’s Office cites the [CSU Budget](#) was 12.4 billion for 2022-23, leading to questions about the bill’s potential to raise hefty funds.

[The National Center for Drug Abuse](#) reported that 10.2% of Americans over 12 years of age had Alcohol Use Disorder in 2020. This is hardly surprising, due to pandemic-related drinking. [The Washington Post](#) claimed that alcohol use skyrocketed, and the number of deaths related to alcohol rose by more than 45 percent and alcohol was the primary cause of death for more than 54,000 Americans.

Recent studies in [August claimed the gender gap](#) between women and men from alcoholic-related deaths was narrowing.

Yet despite the statistics citing the dangers of exposing underage students to alcohol advertising, it appears the universities are still interested in AB 840 to increase tight budgets, even though the audiences at CSU are 40% underage, according to Alcohol Justice.

*“I can see the industry saying, ‘if CSU doesn’t care, why should we?’” said Michael Scippa, public affairs director for Alcohol Justice. “If CSU doesn’t care about kids dropping out, crashing their cars, getting assaulted... why should Big Alcohol?”*