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YCC calls for details on new alcohol policy

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Days before new Connecticut laws on underage drinking go into effect, the Yale College Council passed a resolution Wednesday evening calling on the administration to issue an explicit statement about the impact of the law on Yale students.

The first resolution of the year, which passed unanimously, asks the Yale College Dean's Office to explain in detail how the new legislation will be enforced on campus and by the New Haven Police Department, and pledges to host a town hall forum with administrators and legal experts to educate students on the legislation.

The University sent notice of the new law to students' homes over the summer, but administrators, residential college deans and masters have since offered ambiguous opinions about how the new law will influence Yale's traditionally hands-off alcohol policy.

Set to take effect Oct. 1, Connecticut House Bill No. 5211, "An Act Concerning Underage Drinking," will make it illegal for minors to possess alcohol on private property and for adults to allow minors to possess alcohol on their property.

While some students said they welcome an effort to open discussion on the topic, others said they are concerned that the resolution will only trigger an administrative crackdown on underage drinking.

YCC President Emery Choi '07 said he hopes to educate students about how the state law will affect Yale's alcohol policy.

"Yale's priority has traditionally been to keep students safe, and it has made that very clear," he said. "But this law impedes that, so it's a safety concern."

YCC representative Mark Godfrey '08, who is one of the resolution's sponsors, said the resolution has been under discussion since the letter was mailed in August.

"A lot of people don't know what the policy entails and what changes there will be," he said. "This is a good way to let people to know about it."

Godfrey said he does not think the resolution will necessarily lead to more underage drinking restrictions from the administration.

"I don't see any negative results coming through," he said. "Our aim is just to make sure that students hear what the administration is doing."

The resolution calls on the administration to address the "uncertainty as to how [the law] will affect the Yale community" because "students may not fully appreciate the consequences." The YCC also proposed an open forum to allow students to ask questions about the specifics of the law and express their concerns to Connecticut state representatives, the Dean's Office and other University administrators.

"This is going to affect every undergraduate in Yale because the key to the college experience is social activity, and a big part of that at most college campuses is alcohol," YCC Secretary Zach Marks '09 said.

Marks is a food critic for the News.

Some students said they are pleased that the YCC is taking action to educate students about new underage drinking policies.

Skawennio Barnes '10 said she has not noticed any "formal response" to the laws and hopes the resolution will encourage the administration to inform the student body about any changes in school policy.

"I feel that the administration should tell us how it's going to treat the issue," Barnes said. "In the letter they only said how Connecticut laws are changing, but how is Yale going to change and how is it going to affect the students here?"

But Sam Heller '08 said he is concerned that the YCC resolution will provoke stricter enforcement of underage drinking, which he said will make the undergraduate experience less enjoyable.

"I think forcing an explicit statement is a bad idea," he said. "Non-enforcement is the only way Yale is going to be any fun."

Heller said he has noticed that the issue has been left up to residential college masters to enforce and hopes that the administration will maintain this status quo.

But Lauren Blas '09 said she sees no reason to evade the new state laws.

"Yale should comply with the law," she said. "It's not a huge thing to ask people just to obey the law."

The town hall forum is tentatively scheduled to take place in early October.