



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

January 28, 2015

The Honorable Maxine Grad
Chair, Judiciary Committee
Vermont House of Representatives
115 State Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05633

The Honorable Willem Jewett
Vice Chair, Judiciary Committee
Vermont House of Representatives
115 State Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05633

Dear Chairman Grad and Vice Chair Jewett:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), an alliance of consumer, safety, medical and public health groups, and insurance companies working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent crashes, save lives, reduce injuries, and contain costs, supports enactment of House Bill (H.) 560. This legislation will reduce impaired driving in Vermont by requiring the use of interlock ignition devices (IIDs) by all convicted drunk drivers, including first time offenders, and will improve Vermont's IID law which currently permits optional IID use. Ignition interlock devices are proven technology that helps prevent drunk driving recidivism and save lives.

Drunk driving is a deadly and costly threat to Vermont families. In 2014, there were 44 fatalities on the state's roads and nearly one third of those deaths (14) were alcohol-related (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, (NHTSA)). This serious problem requires an effective solution.

States that have adopted IID laws for all offenders are saving lives and reducing injuries. Arizona, Oregon, New Mexico and Louisiana have all experienced dramatic decreases in drunk driving deaths of more than 30 percent after enacting an all-offender IID law (MADD). In addition, when West Virginia adopted its ignition interlock program, recidivism was reduced by 77 percent among first-time offenders.¹

A common misconception is that most people who are convicted of their first drunk driving offense are social drinkers who made a one-time mistake. On average, a person arrested for impaired driving has driven drunk approximately 80 other times (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)). According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), each day, people drive drunk almost 300,000 times, but fewer than 4,000 are arrested. The CDC reports that when IIDs are installed there is about a 70 percent reduction in arrest rates for impaired driving. Moreover, research shows that 50 to 75 percent of convicted drunk drivers continue to drive on a suspended license.²

Unfortunately, children are frequently innocent victims of drunk driving crashes when placed in a dangerous situation through no choice of their own. In 2014, of the traffic fatalities involving children

¹ Tippetts, A. Scott and Robert Voas. "The Effectiveness of the West Virginia Interlock Program." *Journal of Traffic Medicine* 26 (1-2) (1998): 19-24.

² Peck, R.C., Wilson, R. J., and Sutton, "Driver license strategies for controlling the persistent DUI offender, *Strategies for Dealing with the intent Drinking Driver.*" Transportation Research Board, Transportation Research Circular (1995) No. 437.

age 14 and younger, 209 children (19 percent) were killed in a crash involving alcohol (NHTSA, 2016). More than half were occupants of a vehicle with a driver who had a blood alcohol content (BAC) level of .08 percent or higher. From 2001 to 2010, approximately 1 in 5 child passenger (less than age 15) deaths in the U.S. involved drunk driving; 65 percent of the time, it was the child's own driver that had been drinking with a BAC of .08 or higher. Over 60 percent of child passengers of drunk drivers were not buckled up in the fatal crash.³

Almost every 90 seconds, a person is injured in a drunk driving crash in this country. In 2014, an average of one alcohol impaired driving fatality occurred every 53 minutes in America resulting in a total of 9,967 deaths (NHTSA, 2016). According to MADD, one in three people will be involved in a drunk driving crash in their lifetime. These tragic, preventable crashes also create a financial burden of \$132 billion annually (MADD).

The American public strongly agrees that it is past time to use IIDs to address this public health crisis. Nearly eight in ten Americans support requiring ignition interlocks for all convicted DUI offenders, even if it's their first conviction.⁴ Furthermore, 82 percent of offenders themselves believe the IID was effective in preventing them from driving after drinking.⁵

While Vermont reduced the number of fatalities on its roadways in 2014 over 2013, early data for 2015 indicates that fatalities are again on the rise. The Vermont Highway Safety Alliance reports 57 people died on Vermont's roads in 2015, an increase of 30 percent.

Each person needlessly killed in alcohol-related crashes on Vermont's roads forever changes the lives of families, friends and communities. Advocates urges you to support passage of H. 560.

Sincerely,



Jacqueline Gillan
President

cc: Judiciary Committee Members

³ Quinlan K, Shults RA, Rudd RA. (2014). Child passenger deaths involving alcohol-impaired drivers. *Pediatrics*, 133(6). Advance online publication. doi:10.1542/peds.2013-2318.

⁴ Caution Ahead: New Year's Ranks As Deadliest Day On US Roads, Dec. 26, 2012, AAA article available at <http://newsroom.aaa.com/tag/ignition-interlock-devices>.

⁵ Morse, BJ and DS Elliott. Hamilton County Drinking and Driving Study: 30 Month Report. Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado, 1990.