

The Connecticut College of Emergency Physicians Supports Bill # 6822: AN
ACT CONCERNING THE INSTALLATION OF INTERLOCK DEVICES

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Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, Members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Bill 6822. I represent the Connecticut College of Emergency Physicians, over four hundred board certified physicians who staff the emergency departments and trauma centers in every hospital in the state. We witness daily the human toll of driving under the influence of alcohol, and we support effective measures which will make our roads safer. Interlock devices are a proven tool that help problem drinkers to refrain from driving under the influence.

In addition to my 20 years of experience as a practicing emergency physician, I have spent two years at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in Washington as a visiting Medical Safety Fellow, and I currently serve on an impaired driving prevention workgroup based at the Center for Disease Control, or CDC, in Atlanta and I can fairly claim to be an expert on traffic safety and impaired driving.

We have worked hard over the past three decades to reduce the number of fatalities and injuries caused by drink driving, and in so doing we have found that no one method is completely effective. In fact, all of the methods combined, including ever harsher penalties, DUI checkpoints, advertisements, etc. are not completely effective. We have significantly reduced driving under the influence but it remains nevertheless one of our most pressing public health issues. Any reasonable method that reduces the frequency of DUI should be part of the armamentarium, and that includes court ordered installation of ignition interlock devices.

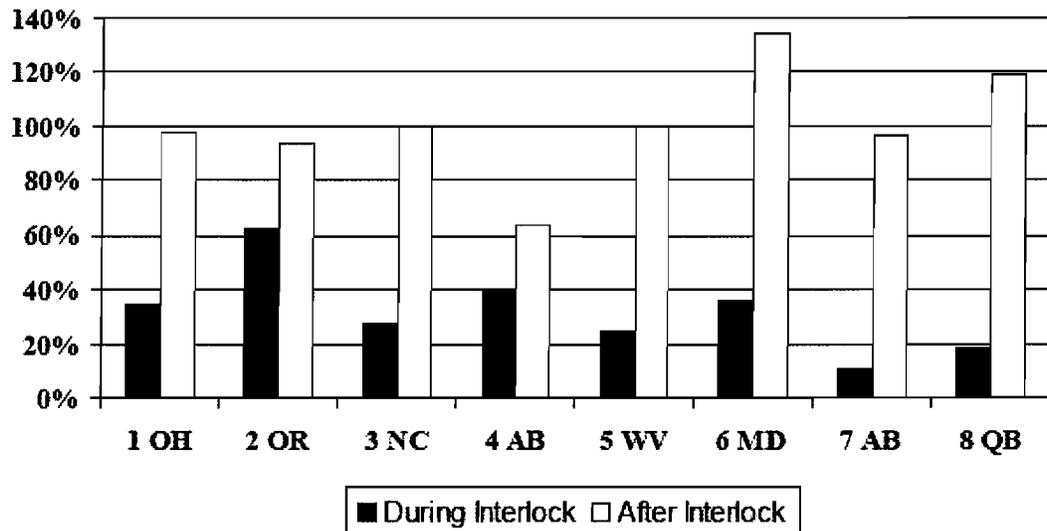
Research has shown rather convincingly that, when required after even the first offense, ignition interlock devices reduce drunk driving by slightly over 60%. Unfortunately, research has also shown that, in jurisdictions where interlock use is at the discretion of the presiding judge, it is ordered infrequently. While I would personally have supported court mandated interlock installation after the first conviction, I am encouraged by the fact that, under the terms of 6822, interlock use is mandatory after the second conviction for a period of two years following one year of suspension. There is every reason to anticipate that this will have a significant positive impact on highway safety in Connecticut.

I have heard all of the arguments against interlock devices and would like to say a few words of rebuttal concerning the two most common objections. First of all, an interlock is affordable. It is estimated that the average multi-conviction drunk driver spends over \$13 per day on alcohol. At \$2.50 a day for the rental of an interlock, a problem drinker actually stands to save money as long as he or she

cuts down on drinking so as to be able to drive. It has been said that the device can be bypassed by having a passenger blow into it. Do you know a sober passenger who will blow into an interlock in order to allow an intoxicated person get behind the wheel? If so, he or she must truly have a death wish.

While I do support this law, there are areas in which I feel it needs improvement:

- There is **no specific penalty for not complying with court ordered installation** of an interlock device. Studies have shown that a significant percentage of individuals will ignore such an order unless there is an effective verification process and strong penalties up to and including incarceration and or confiscation or mandated repossession of the vehicle in the event of noncompliance.
- In many cases, the interlock does not have a durable effect. In other words, many drivers resume DUI as soon as the interlock is removed. Certain drivers will require a device for several years rather than just two as provided under this bill. The following graph demonstrates DUI rates both during and after interlock device usage in several states and provinces. It demonstrates rather convincingly why **criterion-based removal** is preferable to a set length of time.



- A system of **monitoring the interlock device** is essential to success in reducing drunk driving and establishing criteria for allowing interlock removal. Units record all attempts to start the car. This data can be downloaded at regular intervals and will show attempts to start the car while inebriated, a predictor of early recidivism following removal of the device. Merely having a device installed without a monitoring program is not particularly effective in reducing drunk driving.