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**TESTIMONY OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
APRIL 2, 2007**

I appreciate the opportunity to support Senate Bill 1348, An Act Strengthening Drunk Driving Enforcement.

In Connecticut, 120 people died in 2005 as a result of accidents involving drunk drivers. We have reached a plateau -- after years of progress -- requiring new approaches and action.

Most important in this legislation is requiring the installation of ignition interlock devices in a motor vehicle upon the first conviction. These devices have been successful in requiring drivers to pass a breathalyzer test before their cars are operable. In more than 20 studies, these devices have been credited with a 50-90% reduction in recidivism among drunk drivers. Ignition interlock devices save lives simply by preventing drunk drivers from operating their motor vehicles.

This legislation also seeks major reforms to pursue and penalize drunk driving, strengthening prosecutions and toughening penalties for driving under the influence and prohibiting open containers of alcohol in motor vehicles. These provisions -- based in large part on The Sobering Truth report prepared by former Lieutenant Governor Kevin Sullivan -- include:

- Requiring vehicle forfeiture after the third conviction of driving under the influence;
- Increasing the criminal penalty for tampering with an ignition interlock device from a class C misdemeanor to a class B felony;
- Allowing a court to suspend a driver's license as part of the criminal sentencing rather than forwarding the court finding to the Department of Motor Vehicles for licensing action;
- Extending the maximum time limit for impounding a motor vehicle of a drunk driver from 48 hours to 72 hours;
- Providing the police with 3 days to file drunk driving case reports rather than the short 24 hours period;

- Modifying the administrative per se hearing by eliminating the need for the hearing officer to determine if the police officer had probable cause to arrest the drunk driver, a criminal case determination;
- Prohibiting open containers of alcohol in motor vehicles and creating a rebuttable presumption that the driver was operating a motor vehicle while drinking alcohol if there is an open container of alcohol in the motor vehicle.

The ignition interlock device is a common sense solution -- not the only solution or a panacea, but a sound, solid public safety step that will help stop the continuing scourge of drunk driving. Any one tampering with the system can be prosecuted. Very simply, it can save lives.

Under current law, an ignition interlock system may be ordered by a court to prevent a vehicle from starting if the driver has a blood alcohol reading of more than .025. In lieu of suspending a second drunk driving offender's license for three years, the court may suspend the driver's license for 1 year and condition the driver's license for the subsequent 2 years on use of an ignition interlock system. There are significant criminal penalties -- imprisonment for up to 3 months and a criminal fine of up to \$500 -- for tampering with the ignition interlock device and allowing a drunk driver to use the motor vehicle.

This legislation requires the installation of ignition interlock devices rather than leaving such decision to the discretion of the court. The proposal also retains the significant penalties for tampering with these devices.

I urge the committee's favorable consideration of Senate Bill 1348.