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**Testimony of James Papillo, State Victim Advocate
Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
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Good afternoon Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. For the record, my name is James Papillo and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **SUPPORT** of:

Proposed Senate Bill No. 1237, *An Act Concerning the Penalty for Evasion of Responsibility in the Operation of a Motor Vehicle with Respect to an Accident that Causes Physical Injury*

Raised Senate Bill No. 1348, *An Act Strengthening Drunk Driving Enforcement*

Raised Senate Bill No. 1433, *An Act Concerning Alcohol Education and Treatment for Persons Arrested for Drunken Driving*

House Committee Bill No. 6822, *An Act Concerning the Installation of Ignition Interlock Devices*

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) has assisted many surviving family members of victims killed or seriously injured as a result of alcohol related accidents. It is important to understand that the drunk driver, by his or her conduct, in most cases, victimizes not only the person killed or injured in the crash but also victimizes, among others, surviving family members. In 2005, Connecticut reported 274 accidents involving fatalities, 120 (44%) of those were alcohol related. The number of crime victims related to the 120 alcohol-related traffic deaths is estimated to be at least double that number.

In 2002, Connecticut responded to the problem of drunk driving by lowering the blood alcohol level from .10 to .08 and in 2003, Connecticut responded again by requiring a certified ignition interlock device for persons convicted of a second violation of drunk driving. These are significant steps to help reduce drunk driving as well as to help reduce re-offending in our state. The requirement of an ignition interlock device for the repeat drunk driver will remind him or her that driving is in fact a privilege and the consequences for repeated violations will not be tolerated.

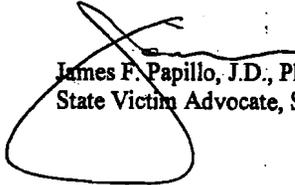
However, Connecticut has failed to join thirty-one other states that have passed open container laws in compliance with the Transportation Equity Act, (TEA-21) (1998). Prohibiting the possession of open containers within vehicles would constitute a significant additional step toward reducing drunk driving and, as a result, the number of victims of drunk driving in Connecticut. The prohibition should extend to any passenger as well as the driver.

There are many distractions while driving; an open container of alcohol and the affects of the alcohol are an unnecessary distraction. The General Assembly has addressed other distractions while driving, for instance, cell phone use and the number of passengers permitted in the vehicle of a teen driver. It is time for Connecticut to take action and pass an open container law.

I applaud this Committee for its willingness to consider strengthening the administrative and criminal penalties for and enforcement of operating a motor vehicle while under the influence. Drunk driving is an insidious problem and those who engage in such misconduct must be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law.

To preserve any value at all (deterrence or otherwise) as punishment for the serious abuse of the privilege to drive in Connecticut, I strongly urge the Committee to support all of these important proposals.

Thank you for considering my testimony.



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