



Office of The Attorney General
State of Connecticut

*TESTIMONY OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
MARCH 11, 2009*

I appreciate the opportunity to support Senate Bill 151, An Act Concerning the Use of Ignition Interlock Devices in Motor Vehicles.

This legislation would extend the driver's license suspension period for a first conviction of drunk driving from one year to 18 months but allow an individual to drive after 6 months if his motor vehicle is equipped with an ignition interlock system. The proposal also allows for a person, upon a third or subsequent conviction, to operate a motor vehicle after 6 years of license suspension provided his motor vehicle is equipped with an ignition interlock system for a period of 4 years.

In Connecticut, the war against drunk driving has stalled. The number of fatalities involving drunk drivers has remained pretty constant over the past several years. In 2007, 101 people died in alcohol related traffic accidents.

Ignition interlock devices have a clear record of reliability and success -- effectively requiring that drivers pass a breathalyzer test before their cars are operable. Results in more than 20 studies show that these devices achieve a 50-90% reduction in recidivism among drunk drivers. A December, 2007 study concluded that drivers who were convicted of drunk driving and ordered to use ignition interlock systems were 60% less likely to reoffend than non users. Ignition interlock devices save lives simply by preventing drunk drivers from operating their motor vehicles.

This mechanism is a common sense solution -- not the only solution or a panacea, but a sound, solid public safety step that will help stop the 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 if the driver is arrested with 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 the use of a motor vehicle equipped with 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.

Senate Bill 151 expands the use of ignition interlock devices, making roads safer for all citizens. I urge the committee's favorable consideration of Senate Bill 151.