STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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Testimony of Michelle Cruz, Esq., State Victim Advocate
Transportation Committee
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Good afternoon Senator DeFronzo, Representative Guerrera and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee. For the record, my name is Michelle Cruz and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **SUPPORT** of:

> **Raised House Bill No. 5384**, *An Act Prohibiting Open Alcoholic Beverage Containers in Motor Vehicles*
> **Raised House Bill No. 5385**, *An Act Concerning the Use of Ignition Interlock Devices in Motor Vehicles*

Every thirty minutes, one person dies from an alcohol related crash in the United States. In 2008, an estimated 11,773 people died in drunk driving related crashes; the latest statistics in Connecticut show that in 2007, one hundred and one (101) people died in alcohol related crashes. For every victim of physical injury or death caused by an alcohol related crash, it is estimated that there are more than double the number of surviving family members. For the one hundred and one (101) people killed in 2007, there are well over two hundred surviving victims. Incidentally, the number of drunk driving incidents may not include offenders that have fled the scene and are not apprehended until a later date; so this number could be higher.

Sadly, Connecticut has not yet passed an open container law. This type of proactive measure is common sense. A study found a 5.1 % decrease in fatal crash rates (among all drivers) attributable to open container laws. Additionally, a second study found that an open container law has a significant deterrent effect against drinking and driving. Additionally, state's that have not enacted an open container law have three percent (3%) of their state's federal highway funds transferred from their highway construction budget each year until a law is passed; funds that are redirected for alcohol impaired driving countermeasures and enforcement of drunk driving laws.

According to a Gallup poll, of the general driving population, ninety-eight percent (98%) perceive drinking and driving as a threat to their personal safety and eighty-six percent (86%) feel it is very important to do something to reduce the problem. Fortunately, there is technology that has the potential to decrease and/or eliminate these preventable deaths – the ignition interlock. This device can prevent a vehicle from being driven by a drunk driver. If used correctly, coupled with strict treatment, tough license suspensions and enforcement, the ignition interlock device can stop or prevent potential repeat offenses of drunk driving.

First time drunk driving offenders have driven drunk an average of 87 times before they are detected and arrested. A first time drunk driving offender may also have a serious alcohol addiction problem. If not appropriately addressed, the drunk driver will likely become a repeat offender. Studies have shown that ignition interlocks can decrease repeat offenses by 64%. We have the technology and we know how to reverse the trend.

I strongly urge the committee to bring Connecticut up to speed with proactive drunk driving measures and pass an open container law and expand the use of ignition interlock devices in drunk driving offenses. Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

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