



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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Testimony of Michelle Cruz, Esq., State Victim Advocate
Transportation Committee
Monday, February 14, 2011

Good afternoon Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrero 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:

Proposed House Bill No. 6198, An Act Prohibiting Open Containers of Alcoholic Beverages in Motor Vehicles
Various Proposals 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 2009, an estimated 12,233 people died in drunk driving related crashes; Connecticut reported a hundred and four (104) deaths due to alcohol related crashes in 2009 alone. Additionally, for each and every injury or death caused by an alcohol related crash, it is estimated that there are at least more than double the number of surviving family members suffering from these tragedies. Stated another way, for each of the hundred and four individuals lost in 2009 due to alcohol related crashes, there are a hundred and four families and extended families, suffering as well. Incidentally, the number of drunk driving incidents may be and most likely is higher, as these statistics do not include offenders that have fled the scene and are not apprehended until a later date.

Sadly, despite the efforts of many victim advocates and others, Connecticut has yet to pass an open container law. This type of proactive measure is based upon 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 open container laws have a significant deterrent effect against drinking and driving. Further, each year Connecticut loses three percent (3%) of our state's federal highway funds transferred from our highway construction budget each year until an open container law is finally passed. Due to our state's failure to adopt an open container law, Connecticut is missing out on an opportunity to capture much needed funds.

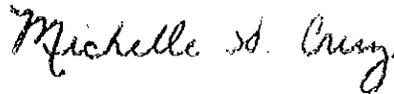
According to a Gallup poll, of the general driving population, ninety-eight percent (98%) perceive drinking and driving as a threat to their personal safety and eighty-six percent (86%) feel it is very important to do something to reduce the problem. Fortunately, there is technology that has the potential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

tough license suspensions and enforcement, the ignition interlock device can stop or prevent potential repeat offenses of drunk driving.

It is estimated that 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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle D. Cruz".

Michelle Cruz, Esq.
State Victim Advocate