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Testimony by Representative Tom Reynolds
Transportation Committee
February 14, 2011

House Bill 6198, AN ACT PROHIBITING OPEN ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTAINERS
IN MOTOR VEHICLES

Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrero, and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee, I am pleased to testify in support of HB 6198, An Act Prohibiting Open Alcoholic Beverage Containers in Motor Vehicles.

Every 48 minutes there is a drunk driving fatality in this country. One of every 141 drivers in the nation has been arrested for driving under the influence. The average drunk driver has driven drunk 87 times before a first arrest.

Connecticut is among the nation's worst offenders. In 2009 44% of all traffic fatalities in Connecticut were alcohol related—the second highest percentage in the entire nation and a 7% increase over 2008.

This bill would make it illegal for anyone to possess an open alcoholic beverage container in the passenger area of a motor vehicle while the vehicle is on a Connecticut highway. With this bill we will end once and for all the last vestige of legally sanctioned alcohol consumption in motor vehicles. Connecticut is the only northeastern state and one of the last states without an open container law.

Most state residents are shocked to learn that in Connecticut it is legal to party in your car with alcohol. They are also surprised to learn that Connecticut drivers can operate a motor vehicle with an open container of alcohol within arms reach.

Studies by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy study found that states without open container laws experienced greater proportions of alcohol-related fatal motor vehicle crashes than states with one.

Federal law requires states to adopt an open container law. States that fail to do so are penalized with a diversion of a percentage of federal highway construction funds to their highway safety programs. As a result of Connecticut's failure to comply with this law approximately \$40 million of federal highway dollars have been transferred in this way. The bill before you is not federally compliant; therefore, this funding diversion would continue following passage of the bill.

The bill contains reasonable exceptions, including passengers in recreational vehicles, taxis, limousines, and other vehicles for hire. This year's bill subjects the driver only to an infraction for a violation.

Every drunk driving death is a preventable crime. The time for complacency is over. Connecticut's ranking among the worst in the country is a national embarrassment. The time for legislative and gubernatorial leadership is now.