

**William S. Church**  
**(Son Dustin was killed by a drunk driver)**  
**Testimony before the Joint Transportation Committee**  
**in Support of Ignition Interlocks for All Convicted Drunk Drivers**  
**14 February 2011**

A drunk driver killed our son Dustin on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004. He was only 18 years old. Imagine, for just a minute, a policeman coming to your door and telling you that your son is dead. Now, don't think about it anymore, because it becomes too painful, even if it's not real. When it is real, you can't imagine the pain.

You see, not only is your son dead, but so are his children, and their children, an entire branch of a family is gone, snapped dead. There will be no graduation ceremonies, or engagements or weddings. There will be no baseball or bedtime stories with the grand children. The surprise and laughter of Christmas morning will never happen. It's all gone because someone got drunk and drove.

There is nothing you can do about that. There is no bill you can pass or law that you can make that can bring Dustin back to life. But there is something you can do to save others. The most recent statistics I could find for Connecticut were from 2009. That year, only 99 people were killed by drunk drivers. That's pretty good, unless, of course, one of the 99 was your son or daughter or husband or wife. What's alarming is that 60 of those people would be alive today if Connecticut had required repeat offenders to have ignition interlock systems in their cars.

Changing behavior is the key to saving lives. Suspending driver's licenses for longer periods of time doesn't change behavior. People still have to drive to work. People still have to drive to the grocery store. This is a society in which driving is almost a necessity. It's been proven time after time that people continue to drive whether they have a license or not. But if they can't start their car, they can't drive. That's the whole point of an ignition interlock system. If you've had too much to drink, the system won't let you start your car. If you have somebody else blow into the device so you can start your car, the system requires you to take the test again periodically. If you don't, or you don't pass, the lights on your car flash and the horn blares. Law enforcement officers recognize the signs.

The beauty of ignition interlock is that it is paid for by the offender and installed and monitored by an authorized company. The State isn't burdened with the process, meaning there is little expense. The offender is able to continue his life, yet his ability to end someone else's is reduced dramatically. With each turn of the key that doesn't start the car, the offender's behavior is potentially being modified and safety on the roads is certainly improved.

The woman who drank and drove and killed our son Dustin is currently in prison. When she's released, she won't have to use an ignition interlock system even though her history of drinking is clear and she's taken a life. I just hope that when she gets in her car and turns the key, she doesn't kill your son or daughter or your husband or wife. Better than any other solution, ignition interlock can make sure it doesn't happen.

February 14, 2011

Chairman and members of the committee:

My name is Rhema Metell. I am Joshua Metell's younger sister. Joshua was an amazing man with such a promising future ahead of him. One who's teaching skills are still remembered among children, parents, and other teachers. He had an amazing influence on children so much so that after he passed one of his previous 1<sup>st</sup> grade students was crying uncontrollably. I asked her what was wrong but she had a hard time uttering the words, "I miss Mr. Metell." My heart broke for her and I was brought to the sorrowful remembrance of this horrific tragedy.

This tragedy not only affects friends and family it also affects the precious students he had touched during his three years of teaching, as well as the parents and staff he was surrounded by. During the month of July we held a basketball tournament which was sparked by Josh who wanted to do something positive in the community. At this event a previous student of his was present and saw his picture. She walked right up to the picture and said, "That was my teacher. He was my favorite teacher." It brought back the many wonderful memories I had of Josh directing and guiding his students.

When Josh passed away the school as a whole was devastated. They had grief counselors available for students and staff. He was not just any teacher; he was well respected and liked. During his memorial the school closed after a half day to enable the teachers, children and parents he worked with to attend. It is not common to have a male teacher working at the early elementary level. Many of these children lacked male role models in their lives and therefore clung to Mr. Metell for support and guidance.

I am always so proud to hear that he is spoken of often; his fellow teachers remember his humor, his amazing organization, his positive attitude, and the stand he would make for something that was right. I was so privileged to call him my mentor, friend and brother.

I am saddened to see that the man who was blocking the road at the time of the crash remained on the road with a suspended license. Josh was the only person with the legal right to be on the road that day. In March of 2009 my mother and I witnessed David pulling out of his driveway as we were passing it, this almost resulted in another crash. He then proceeded, once we passed, to leave his driveway again after the close call.

I often speak to people about who my brother was and express the deep agony that I still feel. It has been almost three years and it is harder than ever. I feel as though the numbness has worn away and now I am faced with the reality that my brother is gone forever. Nothing will ever bring Josh back, which is absolutely devastating to accept.

Throughout this painful time my family has been left with a feeling of not only grief but frustration. After meeting with the state prosecutor and the state police who had worked many hard hours on this case involving David Vertefeuille, we left both offices hearing the same thing, " We cannot do anything more because of the way the law is written." We wanted clarification; we wanted to

understand why the maximum sentence this man who repeatedly broke the law could face was a year in prison even after his choice to blatantly disobey the law took the life of my brother. He only received 8 months of prison time. He served 5 months in prison and 3 months on house arrest. My family is here today to try to prevent others from experiencing the same frustration and pain we have faced. This will be accomplished by passing the bills 6142 and 6143.

Respectfully,

Rhema Metell

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak. I am in favor of proposed bill #6142 and bill #6143.

I am the father of Joshua Matthew Metell, whose life was lost on April 18, 2008 because of a crash that was caused by a man with a history of repeated offences. The man was driving under a suspended license, as he pulled out of his driveway in a borrowed truck with a trailer in tow with a car on it. He was across both lanes of Route 203 in North Windham. My son, who was on a motorcycle, had no right of way, and took evasive action to avoid hitting the trailer and car only to hit a cement base of a mail box and sand that sent him into a utility pole ending his life.

My wife and I were returning from a meal at a local restaurant and had to be redirected around our son's accident site. We didn't know it was our son at the time. We were told by two state troopers when we returned home that "that our son didn't make it. The accident happened one half mile from our house. Just the day before we had played golf and Josh told me he had made his last payment on his car and was going to take golf more seriously as he would have more money. I was devastated, why? How could this be?

Josh was a first grade teacher at Natchaug, an inner city school. He was a model citizen and had a heart for the Willimantic community. In 2004 he had started a 3on3 basketball tournament during the summer, to help get the inner city youth and young adults interested in something, to limit negative activity on the streets. He was working at Alternate Incarceration Center at the time. The event grew in popularity and in 2010 the event was recognized by CT General Assembly who gave a citation acknowledging the impact the ball tournament had on the community. Our family presents two awards at Natchaug school, Joshua Metell Positive attitude award and What Family Means To Me. This inspirational essay is written by fourth graders and we give three winners scholarships. Joshua was focusing on administrative courses to future his education in this field. What a huge loss it affected many.

We learned about the offender and his many violations for repeatedly driving with a suspended license as well as many other violations. He lied to the police officers, said he wasn't driving, his wife was. He admitted having a meth treatment that morning as well as having three beers "after the accident". He had seven years of violations, many of which were driving under suspension. After Josh's accident in the same year, he was arrested on June 16, 2008 for driving under suspension, no insurance, no registration, misuse of plates. That was less than two months after Joshua died. He was caught again in January 2009 for the same charge. On one occasion I witnessed him speeding and turning left onto Rt. 203 from Rt. 6, right in front of me, tires squealing from the sharpness of the turn to beat the light which had already turned red. Another instance, he pulled out in front of me as I was driving to the post office. I followed him as he took all the back roads to the Chaplin package store at 11:30AM.

My family and I were able to talk with the State Prosecutor about our loss and why there were no laws concerning repeat offenders and more severe restrictions for their actions. He identified the repeated offenders as "scofflaws" because they scoff at the law.

It is too late in our case, but for many others this may be the law that will prevent future tragedies from occurring by removing the "scofflaw" or certainly limiting their activities to the place of obeying the law and if not then more severe penalties.

February 14, 2011

I am writing this letter in support of bill #6142 and bill #6143.

On April 18, 2008 my baby brother Joshua Metell was killed in an untimely crash. He was coming home from brunch on his last day of spring break from Natchaug School where he was a teacher and never made it the rest of the ¼ mile home.

I will never forget the phone call from my mom telling me that my brother was dead. I wanted to unzip my skin and let my soul scream out. Joshua was the definition of a "true" leader. He stood for what was right and just. He was honest and integral. Joshua wanted to see the children's lives changed at Natchaug School. His motivation for becoming a teacher was to make a difference in the children's lives and that motivation/passion spilled out into Willimantic. That is where he started the Thread City 3 on 3 Basketball tournaments. He was a wonderful uncle to my children, buying them books at an early age and computer learning CD's before they could walk. His desire was to see them excel. He would be so proud. Now all they have are slight memories and I have lost the time to grow with him as a dear friend.

If proper laws were in place that fateful day my brother was taken, he would still be alive today. With no stiff laws in place David Vertefuille scoffed at the law one more time and drove a vehicle with a trailer below the crest of a hill across both lanes of traffic, leaving my brother no choice but to collide with a telephone pole.

I beg you to impose these laws regarding driving under a suspended license so people will think twice before getting behind the wheel of a vehicle they have no business being in. In doing so, you will save many families the biggest heartbreak that can never be filled.

Sincerely,

Taysha King (Metell)