William S. (Skip) Church
(Son Dustin was killed by a drunk driver)
Testimony before the Judiciary Committee on H.B. No. 5553
28 March 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to testify concerning House Bill Number 5553, "An Act Concerning Substance Abuse Programs". My testimony concerns the suggested revision of the penalty for a third conviction of operating a motor vehicle under the influence. I've had the opportunity to meet and talk with many of you on other issues concerning drunk driving.

For those of you who don't know, a drunk driver killed my son Dustin on July 10th, 2004. He was only 18 years old. If you're a parent, you know that it's the worst possible thing that can happen. Your life will never be the same. There is always an empty chair at dinner. There is always someone missing from family gatherings. There won't be a graduation or a wedding or grand children to play with. All that was taken away by a drunk driver.

The reason I come to the Capitol is not to tell you about our tragedy. I come in hopes that no other family will have to suffer as ours has. First, I commend you for your desire to make drunk driving laws stronger in Connecticut. The law that went into effect in January, requiring those with a second offense, first conviction for DUI, to install and use an Ignition Interlock Device for 1 year, is evidence of the desire to improve the laws. In that same bill, you have made it mandatory for all convicted drunk drivers to use Ignition Interlock Devices beginning in 2014.

Installing Ignition Interlock Devices as quickly as possible is the key to reducing alcohol related deaths, injuries, destruction of property and recidivism. The people who get drunk and drive have already ignored the laws of the State. It is difficult to imagine that they would respect a mandated suspension. Studies bear that out. License suspension is not the deterrent we would like it to be.

A study for the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation in 2010 by Voas, Tippetts and McKnight states, "*...many feel they can avoid apprehension for unlicensed driving; the limited research to date suggests that up to 75% of convicted offenders continue to drive and up to 84% delay reinstatement for 3 or more years.*

They go on to say, "*This suggests that encouraging reinstatement but with continued controls, as some states have provided through laws*

requiring interlocks as a condition of reinstatement, may be effective if they do not motivate extended delays."

Paul Marques, a senior research scientist with the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation concludes this from his studies, *"Unfortunately, it seems in recent years there are many more drivers who find the benefit of driving unlicensed to be an acceptable low-risk thing to do."*

He goes on to state, *"This becomes a public danger for several reasons, not the least of which is that an unlicensed driver is usually an uninsured driver. If drivers do not feel threatened by loss of their licenses, then suspension cannot serve its intended purpose of restricting road use to those who abide by the laws."*

Whether people are law-abiding citizens or drunk drivers, they need to go to work. They need to go to the grocery store. They need to take their kids to soccer practice. After a couple of weeks of asking friends for rides, the convicted drunk driver is willing to take his chances and drive his own car. That's when it becomes dangerous for us... and often tragic.

What I'm asking you to do is reduce the suspension time, after the mandatory incarceration, from 2 years to 45 days. I'd prefer to see 15 days, but 45 days is consistent with what was passed last session. At the same time, make it mandatory for the offender to install an Ignition Interlock Device on any car they own or operate.

At first, this may sound like it's more lenient. But a punishment ignored is no punishment at all... and in many cases it's deadly. A device that prevents an engine from starting saves lives. I obtained some numbers from the Pennsylvania DUI Association from 2010 as an example of the effectiveness of Ignition Interlock Devices.

- Total number of Ignition Interlocks installed in 2010 – **5,265**
- Total number of failed tests in 2010 – **53,890**
- Total number of failed IID tests from 2003 – 2010 – **251,048**
- Total number of safe and sober miles driven by individuals with an IID for 2003 - 2010 – **274.5 million miles**

As of last night on it's website, SmartStart, one of the approved Ignition Interlock vendors in Connecticut says it has prevented 6,514,700 alcohol starts. If just one start had been prevented, my son Dustin would still be alive.

I'm sure that most of you are familiar with an Ignition Interlock Device. But I have one here and would be happy to demonstrate it or attempt to answer any questions. Thank you.