

William S. (Skip) Church
(Son Dustin was killed by a drunk driver)
Testimony before the Judiciary Committee on S.B. 465
March 17, 2014

My name is William Church and I am here to testify in favor of Senate Bill 465, an Act Concerning Ignition Interlock Devices, if some small but very important changes are made. I've been here testifying nearly every year for much of the past decade. It was 10 years ago that our son Dustin was killed by a drunk driver, and my wife and I have dedicated a good portion of our lives to try to make sure this doesn't happen to other families.

I'd like to start with a thank you. In 2011, you passed legislation requiring ignition interlock devices for repeat offenders of drunk driving. People are alive today because of that. In fact, the latest complete statistics that we have from the Department of Transportation show that in Connecticut, alcohol related traffic fatalities were reduced by nearly 10 percent since the passage of that bill.

What makes this reduction in Connecticut even more remarkable is that throughout the rest of nation, the number of drunk driving deaths rose by nearly 5 percent. This means that what you're doing with regard to ignition interlock devices is working. And by requiring the devices for all offenders more lives will be saved.

Currently, someone in the country dies in a drunk driving crash every 51 minutes. Someone is injured every 90 seconds. And drunk driving costs our country 132 billion dollars per year. There is still work to do.

A bill requiring all offenders to use ignition interlock devices is the next step for Connecticut. However, there is a misconception about the first offender. Most people seem to think that the first time someone is arrested for drunk driving, it's the only time they've been drinking and gotten behind the wheel. It's a simple mistake, an oversight, something they'll never do again.

The reality is that when someone is arrested for drunk driving for the first time, they've actually driven under the influence of alcohol more than 80 times. That statistic is provided by the Centers for Disease Control, acquired through studies they have conducted.

Here is some recorded data from Pennsylvania that brings the point home. In 2010, 5 thousand 265 ignition interlocks devices were installed. In one year, they recorded 53, thousand 890 failed tests. That's 53,890 times that someone was stopped from driving under the influence of alcohol.

As of when I checked the Smart Start website yesterday, their data indicated that their ignition interlock devices around the country have prevented 7 million 519 thousand 439 starts because the drivers had too much alcohol in their system. And Smart Start is only one of six vendors in Connecticut.

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There is no longer any question about the effectiveness of ignition interlock devices. In study after study, whether in the State of Washington or New Mexico, whether from the Centers for Disease Control or the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, the use of ignition interlock devices reduces recidivism.

Requiring ignition interlock devices for all offenders is a must. That's the goal behind this bill. However, a few words need to be changed for this to actually happen. If the changes are not made, I fear this will simply produce the same legislation as the bill in 2011.

First, line 11 uses the term "convicted" and goes on to describe a first or second time. Because Connecticut is a diversion state, a first conviction is actually a second offense. The bill in 2011 already established Ignition Interlock devices for repeat offenders. Once again, the goal of this bill is to require ignition interlock devices for all offenders. Therefore, I strongly suggest using the word offense in verbiage that replaces line 11. The new suggested reading would be "if such person has: 1) committed a first or second offense of a violation of subdivision (2) of subsection (a) of section 14-227a".

In line 529 and in ensuing lines in sections (2) (A) and (B), the word suspension should be replaced by offense. The word offense was used in last year's bill, which passed the House by a vote of 146-3. The same word should be used this year. The reason is that using the word suspension may be akin to using conviction in a diversion state and therefore make the bill simply reiterate what was passed in 2011. We need to be clear that this is for all offenders of drunk driving.

The third point is that this would not become effective until July of 2015. In the 2011 bill, the legislature wanted to enact this as quickly as possible and because of concerns by the Department of Motor Vehicles, the time frame of 2014 was established so that DMV could address its concerns. In pushing it out again, more people will die.