

Testimony of Monica Vandehei
National Board Member, Mothers Against Drunk Driving
Testimony in support of Senate Bill # 365
March 7, 2016
An Act Concerning Child Endangerment While Driving Intoxicated

Thank you Co-Chairman Eric Coleman, Co-Chairman William Tong and members of the Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to testify in support of Raised Senate Bill #365 An Act Concerning Child Endangerment While Driving Intoxicated.

My name is Monica Vandehei, member of the National Board of Directors for Mothers Against Drunk Driving. I came to MADD at age 13 with parents who taught me not to ride with a drunk driver. But my first day at MADD was the first time I was told I have the power to stand up to an adult who had been drinking and how important that was.

Having grown up under your jurisdiction, lived in Tennessee for college where I was an RA, and serving on the Board at MADD I have seen the dangers of drunk driving from every angle. From the moment I was told my family was in danger but there are concrete steps we can take in protecting them I have been fighting to do so and ask you to do the same.

My cousin's 5th birthday is this week and when asked "Paige, what day is your birthday?" she said "I don't know my Marches that well." If she doesn't know her "Marches," how will she know the babysitter is drunk picking her up from school? She would probably think they were being silly and laugh all the way home at every swerve and pothole. Maybe all the way home to God. She doesn't know she is 40% less likely to be properly buckled in.

What about a kid old enough to know they shouldn't ride with a drunk driver? Mom comes to pick them up after a few drinks and they say "I'm not getting in the car with you." Mom says "Fine, find your own way home." If I were 12 years old and told to find my own way home I would think you put me in *The Revenant*! I would think it were better to go home with Mom, because she is my safe place. What I wouldn't know is 61% of children killed in drunk driving crashes are the passenger of the drunk driver.

I stand before not a panel of 5 and 12 year olds but highly educated men and women who crave the knowledge we have to offer. The general public on our road ways don't have the research and data that you do. It is human nature to correlate the severity of our actions to the severity of their consequences.

When an intoxicated driver with a child passenger is stopped by one of our dedicated officers, rather than facing the consequences of a crash they face current laws that do not reflect how severely they endangered that child. I once met a father who picked his kids up after a few beers. They told him they didn't think he should drive but he assured them it would be fine. That man learned the severity of his actions when he realized he had driven his daughters to their deaths.

We ask you to enact Senate Bill #365 so that when someone who has been trusted to keep a child safe drives under the influence with that child in the car, one way or another they will face consequences which reflect the gross severity of their actions.

Thank you for your time and care.