

**Rhode Island Senate Judiciary Committee  
May 7, 2024**

**Testimony in Support of HB 8209**

Chair Craven and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today in support of HB 8209. Safety and Advocacy for Empowerment (SAFE) is committed to promoting safety and rehabilitation through the use of ignition interlocks. Our mission is to empower individuals to make responsible decisions and prioritize the lives of all road users. As the voice of the industry, we drive change by advocating and educating on the importance of this life-saving technology. As a result of our advocacy efforts, DUI offenders have been stopped from drinking and driving more than 35 million times. Working together, we can prevent tragedies and encourage a responsible life after DUI.

SAFE strongly supports the passage of HB 8209 which would improve Rhode Island's DUI law and save lives by requiring that any person convicted of a charge of driving under the influence or refusal to submit to a chemical test, have an ignition interlock system installed in their vehicle as part of any sentence before being eligible for a license reinstatement.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) Fatality Analysis Reporting System, the percentage of traffic fatalities in Rhode Island that are alcohol-related is well beyond the national average of 32 percent. In 2022, traffic fatalities declined in Rhode Island from 2021, but the percentage that were alcohol-related increased to 48 percent.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, NHTSA early estimates from 2023 show a 38.5 percent increase in traffic deaths in Rhode Island.<sup>2</sup> These deaths are 100% preventable and more must be done to stop impaired drivers.

A review of more than 100 million driver records spanning 25 years<sup>3</sup> found that drivers who had one alcohol offense were more than six times more likely to reoffend than drivers with no alcohol offenses. Drivers with two offenses were more than ten times more likely to have an additional alcohol offense compared to drivers with no alcohol offenses, and drivers with three or more offenses had a 15 times greater chance of having an additional alcohol offense than drivers without alcohol offenses.

The only way to stop a drunk driver from re-offending is to install an ignition interlock on the vehicle that a person operates. The interlock device preserves public safety and also allows DUI offenders to safely fulfill work and family obligations. Ignition interlocks are a safe and equitable solution. The consequence for trying to drink and drive on an ignition interlock is not incarceration, but rather a parked vehicle that will not start until the driver sobers up. The ignition interlock keeps DUI offenders compliant. Studies show that IIDs reduce recidivism—by up to 70 percent<sup>4</sup>— among first-time, repeat, and high-risk offenders while they are installed.

We also support requiring the use of ignition interlocks for people who refuse a chemical test and for persons convicted of drug-impaired driving. When alcohol and other drugs are combined, the impairment effect is multiplicative, and the crash risk is up to 200 times higher than that of a sober driver. A recent study indicates that from the sample of individuals in treatment, more than 75 percent of drug dependent individuals reported having substituted their drug of choice with a secondary substance, with alcohol the second most common substitute.<sup>5</sup> In 2016 over half of traffic fatalities with a positive drug test result were positive for two or more drugs, and over 40 percent were also under the influence of

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<sup>1</sup> [Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes in 2022](#), p. 16. DOT HS 813 560, NHTSA, April 2024

<sup>2</sup> [Early Estimate of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities in 2023](#), p.5. DOT HS 813 561, NHTSA, April 2024

<sup>3</sup> Rauch, W., Zador, P., Ahlin, E., Howard, J., Frissell, K., & Duncan, G. (2010). Risk of alcohol impaired driving recidivism among first offenders and multiple offenders. *Journal of Public Health*, 100(5), 919–924.

<sup>4</sup> [Increasing Alcohol Ignition Interlock Use Successful Practices for States](#), CS255777-B, Centers for Disease Control

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7370931/>

alcohol.<sup>6</sup> In July of 2023, the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice found that 37% of impaired drivers tested positive for alcohol and drugs, compared to 0-2% for drug only positives.<sup>7</sup>

**SAFE does recommend a change to the bill on page 21, lines 18-25 where an ignition interlock system fund is created with indigent offenders defined by R.I. Gen. Laws Section 12-15-8. This approach is likely to result in overuse of the fund by people who are not truly indigent, and we respectfully request an amendment be made to ensure Rhode Island's affordability program adheres to national best practices including requiring that state affordability program eligibility be tied to specified state public assistance programs.**

The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrator's (AAMVA) Ignition Interlock Program Best Practices Guide Edition 3<sup>8</sup> recommends on page 26 that determination of ignition interlock affordability should be based on a comprehensive review of participant income and assets and not simply on eligibility for public defender representation. We have included the AAMVA best practices language on affordability programs with our testimony.

We appreciate the committee's consideration of this important legislation that will save lives in Rhode Island and potentially qualify the state for incentive grant funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. We urge swift passage of HB 8209 with the amendment to the ignition interlock system fund. Please do not hesitate to contact me if we can be of assistance to you in this effort. You can learn more about our efforts at [www.safedrive.org](http://www.safedrive.org)

Thank you,

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<sup>6</sup> [Fatality Analysis Reporting System \(FARS\)](#). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

<sup>7</sup> [The 10 Guiding Principles for DWI Courts - All Rise](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Ignition Interlock Program Best Practices Guide Edition 3](#), p. 26, American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, October 2023

