

Honorable Chairman Craven and House Judicial Committee Members,

My name is Mark Dennison and I am writing to you in **SUPPORT** of House Bill H8209. As I have testified in front of this committee in the past, you may remember the story of my son, Matthew Dennison the 17 year old hockey player from West Warwick, who was tragically struck by a person driving under the influence of alcohol on February 12, 2024, and eventually succumbed to his injuries on March 10, 2022. Since the passing of our beloved son, Matthew's mother Brenda and I have taken on the mission of assisting our caring, knowledgeable state legislators in strengthening our state's extremely weak DUI laws. We have told our story, as painful as it is, over and over to several committees in the hopes of raising awareness to the fact that a tremendous problem exists in our state. DUI is a problem we have failed to properly address for decades and we finally have the opportunity to do something to protect our citizens and those who travel our state's roadways.

Shortly after Matthew's crash, the man who struck Matthew appeared in court for his initial arraignment. He told the magistrate he was attending classes in Connecticut to become a licensed EMT. While Matthew was in RI Hospital fighting for his life and losing battles that would eventually claim his life, the magistrate felt it was appropriate to allow the defendant to drive a vehicle if it was equipped with an ignition interlock system. As we watched our son literally lose pieces of his body due to injuries sustained in the crash caused by this man, we had to wrestle with the thought of the defendant continuing to drive at the risk of harming others. Although I strongly disagree with the magistrate's decision to allow the defendant to drive under any circumstance, the installation of an interlock device was the only thing we could grasp onto to help us get past the idea that someone in the state's judiciary could allow this to happen.

Since I was sixteen years old and took drivers education classes, I have always understood that driving is not a right, but a privilege. Part of acquiring that privilege and maintaining a license in good standing is making good decisions. The dangers of DUI are not lost on anyone. It is not a mystery of the potential devastating results of driving under the influence of alcohol. Unfortunately, my wife, daughter, and I experienced firsthand the horrific situation of deciding if discontinuing life support was what was best for our son and brother. When the doctors told us our child had finished his fight and could not recover from his injuries, the only thing we had left was deciding how we would let him die. Our choices were to keep on treating Matthew and allow him to suffer the inevitable traumatic incident that would take his life or stop life support and leave it in God's hands to determine how Matthew would leave this earth. For Matthew's sake, we chose the latter and watched Matthew struggle for 49 minutes until God took him. During those excruciating 49 minutes, I found myself both praying that God would end his suffering or provide us with a miracle and return our Matthew to us regardless of the care he would need moving forward.

Good decisions are what keeps us safe. Poor decisions have enough impact to destroy a family. I support H8209 as it forces the installation of a potential lifesaving device, an interlock device, after just the first **CONVICTION** of driving under the influence ( $\geq$  .08 BAC). While some may say this provides a hardship to the convicted person or it represents a trampling of a person's rights, I am quick to remind them that the privilege of driving comes with responsibility. And those who lack responsibility cannot be allowed to put the public in jeopardy. As I know all too well, this terrible problem can strike anyone at any time.

I respectfully ask that you pass this bill out of committee so it may receive a full vote on the floor.  
Our state depends on your action when it comes to the terrible problem of DUI.

Thank you,

Mark Dennison

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