



Wisconsin State Senate

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Senate Unanimously Passes Drunk Driving Reform Package
Legislation Will Create Tougher Sanctions, Promote Prevention and Treatment

Madison, WI— Senate Bill 66, the drunk driving reform package authored by Sen. Jim Sullivan (D-Wauwatosa), passed the Senate today by a vote of 32 to 0.

During his speech on the Senate floor today in favor of drunk driving reform, Sen. Sullivan read a letter from Matthew Heroux, whose 18-year-old sister Talhia was killed by a drunk driver.

“Matthew writes: ‘The constant reminders of my sister that I see and hear have made living my everyday life tremendously difficult. There are so many things I never got to say to her. We will never laugh together again, or even have a simple conversation. To see the door to her bedroom closed, knowing she won’t be walking out ever again, I don’t think time will ever heal that pain,’” said Sen. Sullivan.

Sen. Sullivan said Heroux’s story exemplifies why the Senate needed to pass Senate Bill 66.

“It is frustrating to realize there is nothing within the power of the legislative body to make up for the kind of tragedy families have suffered as a result of drunk driving. We cannot bring Talhia home for the holidays. But we can honor her memory by passing Senate Bill 66, which will create tougher sanctions for drunk drivers, and expand treatment options and prevention mechanisms in our state,” said Sen. Sullivan.

Wisconsin has the highest rate of drunk driving in the nation. According to the Department of Transportation, alcohol-related crashes killed 234 people in 2008, and injured more than 4,000 people.

Senate Bill 66 will make a fourth OWI offense a felony if the driver has a previous OWI-related conviction, suspension, or revocation within the previous five-year period. The bill will also criminalize the 1st offense OWI if children are in the vehicle. In addition to tougher sanctions, Senate Bill 66 expands the use of Ignition Interlock Devices (IID), one of the tools that government has to prevent drunk drivers from getting behind the wheel. Senate Bill 66 also includes statewide expansion of the successful Winnebago County Safe Streets pilot program, which directs some offenders into alcohol treatment programs.

The Assembly passed its version of drunk driving reform, Assembly Bill 283 on September 17, 2009.

Last session, Senator Sullivan successfully passed legislation that provided incremental penalties for drunk drivers. This package further strengthens the tools and options available to Wisconsin’s law enforcement and court systems.

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