



**WRITTEN AAA NORTHEAST TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 6211, WHICH
WOULD STRENGTHEN IGNITION INTERLOCK REQUIREMENTS AND HELP COMBAT
DRUNK DRIVING IN RHODE ISLAND**

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My name is Mary Maguire, and I am Vice President of Public and Government Affairs at AAA Northeast, serving more than 540,000 members in RI—roughly one of every two licensed drivers. I write in support of House bill 6211, and I'd like to thank Representatives Hull, Craven, Noret, Read, Serpa, Casimiro, and Dawson for sponsoring this vitally important legislation. I'd also like to thank Attorney General Neronha for his leadership on this critical safety issue.

AAA Northeast strongly supports the passage of HB6211, which would mandate individuals convicted of driving under the influence to have an ignition interlock device (IID) installed in their vehicle as part of the sentence. First-time DUI offenders would be required to use an IID for six months, and longer IID installation periods would be required for repeat offenders. In our view, mandating IID use will significantly reduce alcohol-impaired driving in our state.

Drunk driving is an increasingly serious issue both nationally and in Rhode Island, accounting for roughly a third of all roadway fatalities across the country every year. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, (NHTSA) more than 13,000 people died in crashes in 2022 in which alcohol was a factor. Locally, data from the Rhode Island Department of Transportation shows that from 2011-2024, more than 300 individuals were killed in alcohol-related vehicle and motorcycle crashes, and alcohol is a factor in 43 percent of all fatal crashes in the Ocean State—the highest percentage in the nation, with Rhode Island tied with South Carolina. NHTSA's research shows that nationally, repeat offenders account for a third of all drunk driving arrests. In our view, this legislation will not only reduce first-time DUI offenses but will curb recidivism rates by requiring longer IID installation periods for repeat offenders.

IIDs remain one of the most common, effective and well-accepted countermeasures for impaired driving. IIDs are breathalyzers installed in vehicles that prevent them from starting if alcohol is detected, and AAA considers IIDs to be a more effective tool than

license suspension for curbing drunk driving: that's because research shows that up to 75% of drivers with suspended licenses simply continue to drive. And many states allow sober offenders with interlocks installed to continue driving to work, school and medical appointments during the installation period. Twenty-eight states have all-offender ignition interlock laws that apply to first time offenders. In addition, all 50 states have laws requiring or authorizing the use of IIDs for certain drunk driving offenses, ranging from drivers who refuse to submit to an impaired driving chemical test, to first-time, repeat and/or highly impaired offenders. On the federal level, Congress has also incentivized states to enact all-offender IID laws. Only states with all-offender mandates are eligible to apply for certain impaired driving grant funds through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Most importantly, IIDs are also a well-accepted and understood countermeasure by the public. AAA's 2019 Traffic Safety Culture Index found that roughly 80 percent of survey respondents support use of IIDs for first time offenders. Rhode Island's IID laws are far less impactful as compared with federal and many state policies, and don't adhere to widely-agreed upon recommendations from traffic safety experts.

According to the AAAFTS, (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety) 94% of people surveyed think driving after drinking is a very or extremely dangerous action. Further, it is important to keep in mind that impaired driving is an underlying factor for other highly dangerous traffic offenses as well, such as extreme speeding, aggressive driving, and wrong-way driving — another serious issue in RI. AAA Northeast supports efforts from Rhode Island legislators to address wrong way driving. Indeed, AAA research shows that the odds of being a wrong-way driver increase as blood alcohol content (BAC) levels increase. **This Foundation study found 60% of nearly 3,000 wrong-way drivers involved in fatal collisions had a BAC (blood alcohol concentration) of .08 or higher.**

HB 6211 closes a critical loophole in state efforts to curb impaired driving and alcohol-involved traffic fatalities. Rhode Island would join dozens of other states in requiring all-offenders IID laws and crack down on repeat offenders at the same time.

Clearly, Rhode Island is in crisis when it comes to alcohol related crashes. Enactment of this legislation will deter instances of alcohol-impaired driving and save lives.

Accordingly, AAA Northeast strongly supports the passage of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Maguire, Vice President, Public/Government Affairs