



NEWS RELEASE

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MADD's Report Highlights Need for OWI Reform in Wisconsin

Legislation pending to help stop drunk driving and hold offenders accountable.

Madison, WI – [Mothers Against Drunk Driving](#) (MADD) released its annual [Campaign to Eliminate Drunk Driving: 2014 Report to the Nation](#) which rated states based on five criteria for effectively addressing drunk driving. The report is a blueprint for the nation to stop drunk driving deaths and highlights MADD's number one legislative priority: ignition interlocks for all convicted drunk drivers.

MADD awarded Wisconsin two out of five stars and finds it to have one of the worst drunk driving records in the nation. To improve its rating, the Wisconsin legislature must get tough on drunk driving and pass laws to require ignition interlocks for all convicted drunk drivers, legalize sobriety checkpoints and allow for no-refusal activities. Since MADD issued its first state rating in 2011, Wisconsin was the only state to lose a star as the state no longer can conduct no-refusal activities.

“Reducing drunk driving in Wisconsin begins with requiring interlocks for all convicted drunk drivers, starting with the first offense,” said MADD National President Jan Withers. “Legislation of this type in other states has a proven track record of saving lives stopping drunk driving.”

MADD states in the report that all stars are not equal and that requiring ignition interlocks for all convicted drunk drivers is the best way to protect the public from drunk drivers. However, in the case of Wisconsin moving on legislation, like AB 738 authored by Representative Jon Richards, to require ignition interlocks for all offenders will result in substantial reductions in recidivism and, most importantly, a reduction in drunk driving deaths.

Wisconsin is in particular need of reductions in OWI deaths. In 2012, 200 people were killed in crashes involving a drunk driver in Wisconsin—representing 33 percent of all traffic fatalities. “First-time” offenders are rarely first-time drunk drivers. Conservative estimates show that a first-time convicted OWI offender has driven drunk at least 80 times prior to being arrested. According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, a majority of drunk driving deaths and injuries are caused by drunk driving offenders with no prior convictions.

License suspension alone is no longer a practical way to deal with drunk drivers. Research shows that 50 to 75 percent of convicted drunk drivers will continue to drive even with a suspended driver's license. Ignition interlocks allow a convicted drunk driver to continue driving, but in a way that will protect families and other motorists. According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation in 2012, of the 26,632 people convicted for OWI, 2,122 were rearrested within six months for driving on a revoked or suspended license.

“MADD believes that ignition interlocks are a more effective OWI countermeasure than license suspension alone and data in Wisconsin reflects this notion. Ignition interlocks allow convicted drunk drivers to continue driving in a sober fashion immediately following an OWI conviction, but in a way that will protect families and Wisconsin residents,” added Withers. AB 738 is currently pending in the Assembly Committee on State Affairs and Government Operations.

AB 273, by Representative Jacque, closes a loophole which was created as a result of the recent *Missouri v. McNeely* Supreme Court decision which found a blood draw without a warrant violates the Fourth amendment. Previously, law enforcement was able to obtain a chemical test without a search warrant of a suspected drunk driver who refused a test. Most first-time OWI arrests are civil infractions and as a result a loophole was created as law enforcement is unable to obtain a search warrant for a civil infraction. AB 273 would allow for search for first-time OWI offenders who refuse a field sobriety test.

“AB 273 gives law enforcement the tools needed to hold suspected OWI offenders accountable. Allowing law enforcement the ability to request search warrants will help ensure justice for those who choose to drive drunk,” added Withers.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, the refusal rate has risen from seven percent in 2008 to over 13 percent in 2012 with 4,443 refusals. As a result of *McNeely* Supreme Court decision, most first-time arrested offenders can refuse a blood or breath chemical test, and law enforcement has no options to compel a chemical test. AB 273 is pending in the Assembly Criminal Justice Committee.

“The Report is a blueprint for the elimination of drunk driving. Families in Wisconsin deserve to be protected from drunk drivers, and MADD calls on the legislature to take action to stop drunk driving by requiring interlocks for all convicted drunk drivers and giving law enforcement the tools necessary to cut down on refusals,” added Withers.

The full Campaign to Eliminate Drunk Driving report can be found at <http://www.madd.org/reporttothenation2014>. For more information on ignition interlocks, please visit www.madd.org/interlock.

About Mothers Against Drunk Driving

Founded in 1980 by a mother whose daughter was killed by a drunk driver, Mothers Against Drunk Driving® (MADD) is the nation’s largest nonprofit working to protect families from drunk driving and underage drinking. With the help of those who want a safer future, MADD’s Campaign to Eliminate Drunk Driving® will end this danger on America’s roads. And as one of the largest victim services organizations in the U.S., MADD also supports drunk and drugged driving victims and survivors at no charge, serving one person every 8.6 minutes through local MADD victim advocates and at 1-877-MADD-HELP. Learn more at www.madd.org or by calling 1-877-ASK-MADD.

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