

Drunk Driving Prevention Act Needed

Written by Chris Larson, State Senator, District 7

Monday, 23 November 2015 17:13 - Last Updated Monday, 23 November 2015 17:15



MADISON, WI – On Christmas Eve 1998, I woke up to find out that my good friend and classmate at Thomas More High School, Jennie, had been killed by a drunk driver the night before. It was a devastating blow to each of her friends and everyone who knew her. It was a horrible, preventable tragedy and something that shaped each of our lives going forward. If I could have done something to bring my friend back, I would have. Unfortunately, stories like this are not uncommon in Wisconsin.

Sadly, seventeen years later, stories like Jennie's are still happening because Wisconsin's laws are woefully inadequate in addressing and preventing drunk driving in Wisconsin. With nearly 26% of adults admitting to driving while intoxicated, Wisconsin continues to top the national charts with the highest rate of drunk driving. More alarmingly, first-time OWI offenders are estimated to have driven under the influence at least 80 times before their initial conviction.

The use of ignition interlock devices (IIDs) has shown to be successful in changing offenders' behavior. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention IIDs reduce drunk driving recidivism by 67%. These devices separate drinking from driving, and are proven effective in stopping drunk driving.

Today, I circulated the Drunk Driving Prevention Act (LRB 3902) for co-sponsorship which would require ignition interlock devices (IIDs) for all first-time OWI offenders. This legislation will catch us up to the modern world, reduce drunk driving, and ensure there will be a clear, personal consequence when someone is convicted of driving under the influence.