

July 22, 2019

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Schakowsky and Ranking Member Rodgers:

Thank you for this week's hearing on Legislation to Make Cars in America Safer and for your longstanding leadership to improve safety on our nation's roadways. My name is Colleen Sheehey-Church and I serve an Advisor and Consultant to Responsibility.org.

In previous years I have testified on Capitol Hill as the National President of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). I was honored to testify before this subcommittee a little over one year ago on this topic. Thank you for your continuing leadership on this important issue.

Impaired driving continues to be a crisis in our country and that's why I continue to work toward a day when it can come to an end. Like so many thousands of other people, my work on this issue began when a loved one's life ended.

My son Dustin Church was killed by an impaired driver on July 10, 2004. It's hard to believe it has now been 15 years. He has been gone almost longer than he lived on this earth.

Dustin was only 18 years old, had just graduated from high school and had his whole life ahead of him.

That fateful night, Dustin was not drinking. He was doing what most kids like to do and was hanging out with friends when they decided to go grab a pizza. My husband Skip and I had talked to both of our sons about not drinking until age 21 and never drinking and driving. I am so proud that he didn't make any of those mistakes.

We also talked to our sons about the dangers of riding in a car with an impaired driver. But that night, Dustin needed a ride and he made a fatal mistake. He got into a car driven by a 19-year old female who

had been consuming alcohol, marijuana and PCP. She was a polysubstance-impaired driver. She lost control of her car, careened off the road, flipped and landed in a river.

The driver and a front seat passenger escaped. But Dustin did not. In the back seat and unable to escape, he drowned. He had made so many good choices that night: He was wearing his seatbelt. Tests showed that Dustin was completely sober. We will never know why he got into that car.

Early the next morning, Skip and I got that knock on the door that no parent should ever receive. The pain of losing someone so senselessly to a 100 percent preventable crime never goes away. If I can prevent even one person from experiencing that needless heartbreak through my advocacy work, then it helps me honor Dustin's life.

In 2017, 10,874 families got the same knock on the door that we did. That's why we must work harder than ever to eliminate drunk and drugged driving.

The laws that the United States Congress and state legislatures have passed during the last four decades have helped reduce drunk and drugged driving crashes by more than fifty percent. But we have so much work left to do. The good news is we have very promising solutions at hand.

Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety (DADSS) – Alcohol Detection Technology

I remember when I was on MADD's board in 2006 and we came up with the concept of a car that wouldn't start if the driver was at a .08 BAC level or above. We launched the Campaign to Eliminate Drunk Driving around it and said, "The Car is the Cure." It was even highlighted in Time Magazine's 2011 List of 50 Best Inventions. What was once a dream is nearly a reality! Several states have invested in testing the technology (Virginia was the first) and DADSS will be the most lifesaving DUI countermeasure in history with the potential to reduce drunk driving deaths by 6,000 or more per year.

By the end of this year, a prototype will be ready for testing in fleet vehicles at a .02 BAC. It's not yet ready for consumers. The size needs to be reduced, reliability needs to be improved, it needs to be a truly passive device and it needs to be set at .08, but the developers are confident that they are on track as originally scheduled for delivery of the consumer product in 2023/2024 for breath-based technology and 2025 for touch-based technology.

Please reauthorize the funding for this program to allow it to reach completion. Responsibility.org is in full support of DADSS. With your help, this life saving technology will become a reality.

High-Risk Impaired Drivers

Repeat DUI offenders, people who drive at high BAC levels at .15 or above and/or people who drive impaired by more than one substance pose a higher crash risk, are involved in more fatal crashes, and are more likely to have a substance use and/or mental health disorder.

Responsibility.org supports screening and assessment for all DUI offenders using a tool that is validated for DUI offenders to ensure that any substance use disorders, and mental health issues are identified and addressed as part of an offender's sentence to prevent repeat DUI offenses. Additionally, high risk offenders need to be monitored to ensure they comply with their sentences as they are often at a high risk of recidivism.

Ignition Interlocks for all DUI Offenders

Responsibility.org supports the use of ignition interlocks for all DUI offenders. This law has been passed in 33 states and research has shown interlocks to be incredibly effective in preventing DUI, especially when used in tandem with screening and assessment (and if indicated, treatment).

Drug-Impaired Driving Countermeasures

Drug-impaired driving is an issue of significant concern and it requires some different tactics such as specialized training for law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges. It is also necessary to ensure that toxicology labs are adequately funded to process blood samples in a timely manner. Additionally, there is a great need for improved data and public education on this issue. Responsibility.org has worked with its partners and with NHTSA and the United States Congress to focus on this issue along with drunk driving as part of its mission to eliminate impaired driving.

Summary

The woman who killed Dustin is now 34 years old. She served one year in jail as part of her plea bargain but then violated many conditions of her probation. She didn't install an interlock, did not get a job, drove without a driver's license and left the state without permission. Ultimately, those violations led her to serve another four years in jail.

There's another part of my story that I haven't told until today. My other son, Casey, has suffered terribly since Dustin died. The loss of a sibling is the loss of a lifetime. Casey struggled as he left for college. Away from home and dealing with grief on his own, he quietly suffered from depression.

His depression led to drug use. His drug use led to dropping out of college. He ended up committing a crime and being sent to jail where there was no treatment provided to him. When he was released, we tried to get him into an inpatient treatment facility. We worked so hard to find a place we could afford that had beds available. We were so desperate to save him. We could not lose our other son, our only living child.

We finally were able to admit him to parent-mandated rehabilitation at His Mansion in Deering, New Hampshire. I am so very proud and relieved to tell you that Casey recovered. He has been sober for 5 years now and remains at His Mansion as a counselor helping others. It has been a very long road for us all. But we are dedicated to helping others manage their grief, overcome their addiction and working to eliminate impaired driving.

I cannot thank you enough for your leadership and I look forward to assisting you in any way I can as you move forward in Congressional efforts to fight impaired driving.

Sincerely,

Colleen Sheehey-Church