



SafeRoadsMD



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Contact: Bill Bronrott, 202-270-4415

Maryland General Assembly Applauded for Passing Bill to Close Loophole in Drunk Driving Prevention Ignition Interlock Law (Noah's Law)

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (April 9, 2024) – A Maryland highway safety coalition today hailed the Maryland General Assembly's passage of long-sought legislation (HB 105) to close a major loophole in the state's drunk driving laws that has exempted most drunk driving offenders from the state's ignition interlock requirement (Noah's Law).

Passage of HB 105 strengthens Noah's Law by ending the exemption of drunk driving offenders who plead down to Probation Before Judgement (PBJ), which accounted for 60 percent of the 10,161 DUI / DWI offenders in 2023 alone.

Safety advocates warned that traffic deaths in Maryland rose by 8 percent last year – from 564 in 2022 to 610 in 2023 – while deaths dropped by 3.5 percent nationwide. Drunk driving deaths in the state jumped by 24 percent from 2019 (167) to 2022 (207), according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. One-third of all Maryland traffic fatalities involve drunk drivers.

Following the death of Montgomery County Police Officer Noah Leotta, the Drunk Driving Reduction Act of 2016 (Noah's Law) was enacted into law in Maryland. Noah's Law requires a person convicted of an alcohol-related driving offense to have an ignition interlock system installed in their vehicle – typically for six months for first-time offenders. However, under the 2016 law, if an offender is given PBJ, they are not required to install the ignition interlock device.

"Thank you for honoring the memories of my son Noah and all victims of impaired driving with the passage of this bill that will finally close the loophole in Noah's Law and save lives," said Officer Leotta's father, Rich Leotta. "I am truly grateful to the lead sponsors – Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary and Senator Jeff

Waldstreicher, the House and Senate judiciary committees, and the persistence of many advocates who made this much needed change to Noah's Law a reality. Also, our thanks to the Moore Administration for its support. We look forward to the Governor's signature."

On average, a drunk driver drives 80 times under the influence before their first arrest. Ignition interlock use prevents DUI recidivism by 67 percent compared to license suspension alone, according to the CDC.

"As a mother whose 12-year-old son Darius was taken from us by a drunk driver, I am grateful that Maryland legislators passed this fix to Noah's Law to ensure more drunk drivers will use an ignition interlock," said Vickie Brown, who volunteers with MADD Maryland. "Requiring these devices for all drunk drivers will stop repeat offenses and protect other families from being shattered by this violent, 100% preventable crime."

In 2022, Maryland's Ignition Interlock Program prevented 7,783 attempts to start or operate a vehicle where the driver's blood alcohol concentration was above the legal limit. Interlocks protect the public but still allow drivers with DUIs to continue driving and meeting family and work obligations.

"This is a welcomed closing of an all too well used loophole in Maryland's 'Noah's Law' by requiring proven effective ignition interlocks for persons put on probation for drunk driving," said Kurt Erickson, President of the Maryland nonprofit Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP).

Traffic safety coalition members that championed passage of HB 105 included:

AAA Mid-Atlantic
Advocates for Highway & Auto Safety
Chesapeake Region Safety Council
Distilled Spirits Council of the United States
Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
Maryland State's Attorneys' Association
National Alliance to Stop Impaired Driving
National Safety Council
Noah on Patrol
Responsibility.org
SAFE
Safe Roads Maryland
Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD)
Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP)

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