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Lawmakers join MADD to push for anti-drunk driving legislation

POUGHKEEPSIE
—
Assemblyman Joel Miller knows about drunk drivers firsthand. Seven years ago, he was nearly wiped out by one.



Bellini speaks as Miller, Molinaro and Skartados listen

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Miller joined forces Wednesday with fellow Assemblymen Marc Molinaro and Frank Skartados, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and local law enforcement at the Dutchess County Sheriff's Office to urge the passage of new anti-drunk driving legislation.

"Today MADD New York joins Assemblyman Joel Miller in calling for reform to New York State's drunk driving law," said Community Action Site Leader of MADD Dutchess County Vincent Bellino. "MADD is calling for reform to New York's DWI laws because people continue to die from a hundred percent preventable crime of drunk driving."

In 2002, Assemblyman Joel Miller was hospitalized by a drunk driver with a BAC of .24 and multiple prior DWI arrests.

"It just brought into focus the folly of our current laws that really don't protect the community," Miller said of his experience from the crash. The lawmaker said that this "is only imposed on people who have been convicted of a DWI," and that it seems to be, "more than reasonable as an imposed condition to get back on the road." "This is something that protects the community, protects the individual, and really doesn't take away anyone's civil liberties."

According to MADD, last year 341 New Yorkers were killed by drunk drivers and since 1998, over 4,000 people have been killed in drunk driving incidents in New York State."

This new legislation, which passed the Senate unanimously on September 10th and is now on its way to the Assembly, would require the mandatory installation of an alcohol ignition interlock system to the vehicle of anyone convicted of drunk driving.

"The alcohol ignition interlock is a breath test device linked to an

engine's ignition system," said Bellino. He explained that when a driver wants to start his or her car, the person must first blow into the device because the vehicle will not start until the BAC is below a preset level.

"Research shows that alcohol ignition interlocks on vehicles of all drunk drivers will significantly reduce deaths and injuries due to drunk driving," Bellini said. "Ignition interlocks have been proven to reduce DWI recidivism rates on an average of 64 percent," he said.

Michael Shultis of National Interlock Service demonstrated the device for lawmakers and MADD officials.

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