



**TESTIMONY OF
Chris Swonger**

**ON BEHALF OF
The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States and Responsibility.org
In support of House Bill 557**

**Maryland House Judiciary Committee
February 23, 2022**

Good afternoon, Chairman Clippinger and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Maryland House Bill 557. I am Chris Swonger, President and CEO at The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS) and the Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility (Responsibility.org).

DISCUS is the national trade association representing leading producers and marketers of distilled spirits products in the United States.

Responsibility.org is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to eliminating drunk driving and underage drinking. We are funded by the following distillers: Bacardi U.S.A., Inc.; Beam Suntory; Brown-Forman; Campari Group; DIAGEO; Edrington; Mast-Jägermeister US Inc.; Moët Hennessy USA; Ole Smoky LLC; Pernod Ricard USA; and William Grant and Sons. In addition, we established and lead the [National Alliance to Stop Impaired Driving \(NASID\)](#). To learn more, visit www.responsibility.org.

I urge swift passage of HB 557 which would expand the use of ignition interlocks by mandating the use of this technology for DUI offenders who receive probation before judgment (PBJ). Currently, 34 states and DC require ignition interlocks for all DUI offenders. Maryland has one of the best ignition interlock programs in the country, but it allows more than 5,000 drunk drivers per year to receive a PBJ on their first offense and avoid installing an ignition interlock. This bill will correct this situation.

Maryland passed Noah's Law in 2016 in remembrance of Montgomery County Police Officer Noah Leotta who died on Dec. 10, 2015, after being struck by an impaired driver while he was on DUI

patrol. We applaud the Maryland General Assembly for passing Noah's Law which mandated the use of ignition interlocks for convicted DUI offenders.

I had the honor of meeting Noah's father, Rich Leotta, in 2019 and I have joined him in a courtroom as we watched numerous DUI offenders be sentenced. The intent of Noah's Law was to make sure all DUI offenders have interlocks placed on their vehicles to protect the public and to give DUI offenders an opportunity to change their behavior. The interlock is one of the most effective ways to prevent drunk driving and drunk driving is a 100% preventable crime.

Two years ago, I promised Mr. Leotta I would join him and the many other groups that support HB 557 to realize the law's original intent – that every impaired driver be required to install and use an ignition interlock device on their car, including people who receive PBJ. The reasons are clear:

- The CDC estimates that drunk drivers drive repeatedly before ever being detected and arrested (an average of 80 times before their first arrest).
- Research shows that many first offenders meet the criteria for alcohol abuse of dependence (Wieczorek, 1992; Couillou et al., 2007).
- Requiring convicted DUI offenders to install an interlock was associated with a 15% reduction in the rate of alcohol-involved crash deaths (Kaufman and Wiebe 2016).

Maryland has the chance to make its program the finest ignition interlock program in the country by passing HB 557. Please pass this bill into law without delay. It will save lives in Maryland.

Thank you.