

**TESTIMONY OF  
Chris Swonger  
ON BEHALF OF  
The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States and  
The Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility (Responsibility.org)  
In support of House Bill 749  
  
House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland State Senate  
February 24, 2021**

Good afternoon Chairman Clippinger and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Maryland House Bill 749. My name is Chris Swonger and I am the 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; DIAGEO; Edrington; Mast-Jägermeister US Inc.; Moët Hennessy USA; Ole Smoky LLC; and Pernod Ricard USA. For 30 years, Responsibility.org has transformed lives through programs that bring individuals, families and communities together to guide a lifetime of conversations around alcohol responsibility and by offering proven strategies to stop impaired driving.

I urge passage of HB 749 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 contains a dangerous loophole, and this bill would close it.

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 legislature 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 sat in a courtroom with him 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.

However, many first-time DUI offenders in Maryland who receive probation before judgment are not sentenced to install ignition interlocks. This is the loophole in Noah's Law. Passage of SB 672 would close it and save lives.

Last year, I promised Mr. Leotta I would join him and the many other groups that support SB 672 to realize the law's original intent – that every impaired driver have an ignition interlock 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 (average of 80 times before 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 749. Please pass this bill into law without delay. It will save lives in Maryland.

Thank you.