



Editor: Mark Epstein's June 12 column, "Trial by Jury" was very insightful into the jury process and I enjoyed reading it very much.

There was one factual inaccuracy, which stated that Mothers Against Drunk Driving supports a bill (AB 2784) which would require an ignition interlock on all new vehicles sold in our state. This is simply not true.

Several organizations have provided funding to study passive alcohol detection systems as standard equipment in new vehicles but at this time it is in the very early stages of research and development.

Passive alcohol detection systems are very different from an Ignition Interlock Device (IID).

An IID is installed into a car after a DUI conviction and will not allow a vehicle to start in our state if the driver blows a .03 blood alcohol content (BAC) or higher. The purpose of an Ignition Interlock Device is to monitor and report attempts to drink and drive by those who have already been convicted of a DUI.

Lawmakers in California recently removed a critical passage in AB 2784 that would have required mandatory use of ignition interlock devices for those convicted of a DUI. Although California currently has 10 outstanding laws on the books that allow judges to order Ignition Interlock Devices for those convicted of a DUI, none require mandatory use for first-time offenders. This is in spite of NHTSA's top safety official, Nicole Nason, urging judges to use this life-saving technology.

Few judges opt to do so in the state of California and restoring AB 2784's mandatory IID provision will keep those individuals from driving drunk in the future; saving countless lives.

Opponents of AB 2784 have led the public to believe that the bill's passage will mean that we can no longer enjoy a champagne toast at a wedding or a glass of wine with dinner. Nothing could be further from the truth. All of California's ignition interlock laws are designed to keep convicted DUI offenders off the road if they are impaired; responsible drivers are not going to be arrested for a DUI and subject to these laws.

California's bill is modeled after successful legislation in New Mexico and many other states that require Ignition Interlock Devices for all convicted drunk drivers.

AB 2784 and the three other IID bills pending in Sacramento are designed to help reduce the 1,300 alcohol-related fatalities that occur on California's roads every year. In New Mexico alone there has been a 22 percent reduction in alcohol-related fatalities and a 65 percent reduction in recidivism since the law's implementation.

At a recent press conference in Los Angeles Assemblymember Todd Spitzer (R-Orange County), stated that using this technology for convicted drunk drivers is the like placing a probation officer in the front seat of every vehicle.

Alcohol-related collisions in California cost the public \$12 billion in 1999; people other than the drunk driver paid \$7.5 billion of that bill. That was almost a decade ago, imagine what the costs are now. Alcohol-related collisions account for an estimated 20 percent of California's auto insurance payments. Reducing alcohol-related collisions by just 10 percent would save \$300 million in claims alone.

For a state in a fiscal crisis, increased use of IIDs will increase public safety and save money for all of us. In addition to the hard costs related to alcohol-related crashes, this sanction is paid for by the offender not the taxpayers.

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