



Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems

MICAP / RECAP

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Drunk Driving Laws Have Helped Reduce Deaths, But 10,000 Die Each Year

Vernon K. Smith, PhD, MICAP Board Member

On northbound I-75 in Kentucky, the Abbas family was returning home to Northville, Michigan after a short Winter vacation in Florida. Without warning, their SUV was struck head-on by a drunk wrong-way driver. The fiery crash killed mom, dad, and all three children.

Killed were Ali, 13, Isabella, 12, Giselle, 7, their father Issam, 42, a lawyer, and their mother, Rima, 38, a medical doctor.

Instantly, the Abbas family was added to the U.S. drunk driving toll for 2019, when 10,142 people were killed by drunk drivers.

The Abbas family deaths deeply affected their community. Many of the children's friends at school were devastated. The tragedy inspired U.S. Representative Debbie Dingell (D-MI) to introduce legislation to dramatically reduce drunk driving: "The HALT Act," shorthand for "The Honoring Abbas Family Legacy to Terminate Drunk Driving Act."

The HALT Act has broad bipartisan support. Its cosponsors include Representatives David McKinley (R-WV), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Kathleen Rice (D-NY.) The HALT Act passed the House in July 2021 as part of the INVEST in America Act, and went to the Senate.

Rep. Dingell has become a passionate advocate for ending drunk driving. On September 8, 2021, she was presented the Legislative Hero Award by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). Speaking at the event, she said: "If you get in a car drunk, you are putting other people's lives at risk, and it's simply not Okay. It's not."

"So many people are losing their lives because of irresponsible behavior, and it's something we just have to attack."

Representative Dingell said she wanted legislation that automakers would support that would prevent people from being able to operate a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol. "The technology exists. Why is it not being used?"

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The HALT Act would require new automobiles to have alcohol detection systems that determine whether the person behind the wheel is under the influence of alcohol drunk, thus preventing a vehicle from being operated by anyone who is impaired.

The HALT Act would prevent 9,400 deaths per year nationally, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and Mothers Against Drunk Driving, which is a strong supporter of the Act.

Meanwhile, in the U.S. Senate, similar legislation titled the “Reduce Impaired Driving for Everyone” (RIDE) ACT, was introduced by Senators Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Rick Scott (R-FL) and supported by Michigan Senators Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters. The RIDE Act was included in the Infrastructure Bill that passed the U.S. Senate in August 2021.

The HALT and RIDE Acts differ in some details, but both would require technology that would prevent an alcohol-impaired person from driving a car.

At this writing, the HALT-RIDE bills are in the Infrastructure package being considered in the U.S. Congress. The provisions of the HALT – RIDE Acts have strong support from diverse set of powerful stakeholders, including Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), the Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility, the Distilled Spirits Council, the Beer Institute, and advocates for highway safety.

The stakes are high. Of the 36,096 highway fatalities in 2019, drunk drivers caused 10,142 deaths and over 300,000 injuries. In 2020, the number of vehicle-miles dropped due to the pandemic, but alcohol-involved highway deaths increased by 9%.

It is staggering the number of times impaired drinkers drive. The Insurance Institute, testifying before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation in 2020, presented these statistics:

“According to the CDC, adult drivers drank too much and got behind the wheel approximately 111

million times in 2016, which equates to more than 300,000 incidents of drinking and driving each day. Research has shown that about one-third of all drivers arrested or convicted of drunk driving are repeat offenders. Arrest data from the FBI indicates that an average drunk driver has driven drunk over 80 times before a first arrest.”

In a survey reported by the CDC, 1.9% of adults acknowledged driving after drinking too much in the past 30 days.

Impairment prevention technology could be one of the most effective strategies ever to reduce highway fatalities, even more effective than airbags. Over the 20 years since airbags were mandated in 1997, airbags are credited with saving 50,457 lives. Technology to prevent alcohol-impaired driving could save the same number of lives in one-fourth the time.

Over the past 20 years, several legislative victories helped to reduce drunk driving deaths and injuries. Notable milestones include the minimum age 21 for drinking, BAC limits reduced from .10% to .08%, open container laws, and widespread use of offender ignition interlock devices.

These actions reduced the number of alcohol-impaired driving fatalities (i.e., the driver had a BAC of .08% or greater) from 17,705 deaths in 1990, to 13,324 deaths in 2000, to 10,136 deaths in 2010. Unfortunately, since 2010, the number of alcohol-impaired deaths has remained virtually constant, ranging from a low of 9,943 in 2014 to a high of 10,967 in 2016.

More can be done, particularly as advocates push for a .05 percent BAC limits and all-offender ignition interlock laws.

However, the most significant thing that can be done now is to install technology on all new cars to prevent anyone who is alcohol-impaired from getting behind the wheel and putting the lives of others at risk.

Polling by MADD confirms the American public supports legislative action to curb drunk driving. The survey, conducted in March 2021, found that 9 of 10 Americans support using a car’s electronics to prevent drunk driving (specifically, 89% said it is a good or very good idea.) Three of four (77%) support Congressional action to require this technology in new vehicles.

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Strong public support and Congressional action may come together in 2021 to save over 9,400 lives a year, which would be the most significant reduction in drunk driving deaths in our lifetimes. It would be a fitting tribute to the Abbas family, whose deaths provided the impetus for The HALT Act.

Supporting MICAP in Retirement

Eileen R. Ellis, MICAP Secretary

If you are over age 70 and have an Individual Retirement Account (IRA), you can support MICAP (and other non-profit charitable organizations) and reduce your taxes by making your donation directly from your IRA. It is almost always better than an itemized deduction, since your gift is not counted as taxable income. As a result, your taxable income is less, and you pay less in federal, state and local income taxes.

In the tax code, it is called a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). The only catch: You have to be age 70 and the gift must be made directly from your IRA. Your gift can be all or part of your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD.)

When you itemize charitable donations, the full value of your donations is not offset against federal income taxes, and you get no credit at all on Michigan state or city income taxes. The QCD strategy reduces taxable income by the full value of the gift for city, state and federal purposes.

With recent changes to federal income tax policy, many more of us are using the standard deduction and not itemizing our charitable donations. Even if you take the standard deduction, you can do a QCD and reduce your taxable income.

For more information about how a QCD can benefit you, please check with your IRA administrator, your tax advisor, or email MICAP at info@micap.org.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

**Vernon K. Smith, PhD,
MICAP Board Member**

Certain people should never drink alcohol. At the top of the list is any woman who is pregnant or trying to become pregnant.

September was Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Month, and offered a timely reminder that the unborn child is harmed when a pregnant woman drinks alcohol.

“No amount of alcohol is safe for a developing baby before birth, because the baby’s brain is developing from the beginning of the pregnancy,” according to the National Institutes on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

An unborn child is exposed to the same amount of alcohol as the woman, and alcohol interferes with the child’s physical and mental development, causing birth defects, learning disabilities, and serious behavior problems.

In the U.S., over 40,000 babies are born each year with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. For these babies, there is no fix and no cure. The baby experiences lifetime conditions caused by drinking during pregnancy.

A pregnant woman also places herself at risk, including higher incidence of prematurity, still birth, miscarriage and sudden infant death syndrome. Alcohol use during pregnancy also impacts the immune system, making the woman more vulnerable to viral infections, bacterial infections and respiratory illness.

Attention to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum is especially important now, since alcohol use has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information, see: www.niaaa.nih.gov



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Sobering Facts: Michigan Drunk Driving Statistics

- 25,820 Michiganders were arrested for impaired driving (BAC of .08%+) in 2020, a dramatic drop from the 30,626 arrested in 2019, and the 41,883 arrested ten years before in 2010.
 - Women are a slowly increasing share of alcohol-impaired arrests, comprising 26% in 2010, 27% in 2015 and 28% in 2020.
- Fewer people arrested in 2020 is associated with fewer police resources available to make arrests, and fewer crashes, not fewer impaired drivers.
- The number of alcohol-related crashes has stayed about the same over the past

decade, dropping only from 9,986 in 2010 to 9,787 in 2019. In 2020, these crashes dropped to 9,078.

- 42% of fatal crashes in Michigan involve alcohol or drug impairment.
- Over the past decade, drunk drivers killed or injured over 5,400 children and adults each year:
 - In 2010: 283 persons killed and 5,458 injured
 - In 2015: 303 persons killed and 5,232 injured
 - In 2020: 326 persons killed and 5,138 injured
- In Michigan, on average, every week 6 people are killed and 100 people injured by drunk drivers.

Source: Michigan State Police, Annual Drunk Driving Audit