

Since 1982 with the inception of the New York State STOP DWI legislation that established county-wide programs throughout the state Nassau County has worked tirelessly in enforcing the DWI statutes, educating the population on the dangers of drinking and driving, prosecuting those individuals that have chosen to ignore the safety of their fellow citizens by impaired driving and the follow up of those convicted by probation. Over the past 5 years Nassau County has averaged more than 3,000 DWI arrests a year and 30 fatalities as a result of the presence of alcohol or drugs.

We have seen legislation that has addressed working to keep our roadways safe from the raising of the drinking age from 18 to 19 and then subsequently to the current 21. In those changes Nassau County saw a decrease in under 21 representation of our DWI activity from 20% to as low as 8% per year. We have seen an improvement in public awareness of DWI and its effects on society. The Designated Driver, The increased care of friends and family to prevent the tragedy caused by DWI. Organizations such as MADD, SADD, DEDICATEDD and others have been striving to fight and educate. We have seen legislation to shore up loopholes that impaired drivers have used to avoid prosecution.

Roadway improvements through engineering, safer cars and features introduced to save lives have been advanced. From the seat belt to the air bag, from the child seat to booster seats we have designed methods to keep occupants of vehicles safe in the event of a crash. From the oldest to the youngest vehicle occupant methods have been designed to keep them safe. Laws have been enacted to keep drivers and their occupants safe. But safety can only be assured with the proper operation of the motor vehicle.

The most vulnerable of vehicle occupants are children. Adults have the opportunity of making decisions on their safety. We want to think that individuals that are impaired will not drive, but sadly that is not always the case. Often times others may enter the vehicles with an impaired driver at their own peril. We have seen deadly crashes on the Southern State in the past year where an unlicensed impaired driver caused the death of four occupants. But these occupants were not children. They had the ability to decide to enter that car.

Leandra's Law was enacted because children do not have the ability to recognize the situations they are in. They are innocent victims in horrific crashes caused by negligence and indifference. When the children boarded the bus leaving St. Edward the Confessor school, they boarded confident of the safety of a yellow school bus, there was no anticipation that the driver would be impaired and place them in danger. There are places children feel secure; their homes, their schools, and the school bus. We as a society place our trust in individuals that have contact with our children. In the mornings we walk our children to the bus stop confident in the driver's ability to keep our children safe.

It is not a bad thing to expect drivers to not be impaired. School bus drivers in particular have the added responsibility of carrying innocents. For that reason Traffic Safety and Nassau County STOP DWI encourage the consideration of a requirement that School Buses have an ignition interlock as part of its standard equipment.