



EDITORIAL

# Cracking Down on Drunken Driving

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The national effort to reduce death and injuries from drunken driving has received a major boost from New York State. Gov. David Paterson signed a law that made New York among the first states to make it a felony to drive while intoxicated with a child in the vehicle. The new law also made New York one of a dozen states to require all convicted drunken drivers to use an ignition interlock device that prevents them from driving their cars if they are drunk.

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The successful push for harsher drunken-driving penalties followed two highly publicized crashes in which children were killed while traveling with adults who had been drinking. In July, a Long Island woman driving the wrong way on Westchester's Taconic State Parkway killed her 2-year-old daughter and three young nieces, in addition to the three men in the oncoming vehicle. The driver, who also died, had a blood alcohol content more than double the legal limit, and had marijuana in her system.

Last month, an 11-year-old girl, Leandra Rosado, was killed after the mother of one of her friends flipped her car on the Henry Hudson Parkway in Manhattan while she was, authorities said, intoxicated. The new law is named Leandra's Law and owes much to the intense lobbying campaign waged by her grieving father, Lenny Rosado.

With his help, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and other supporters of the bill were able to overcome initial resistance from Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, who sought to water down the bill by making drunken driving with a child in the car a felony only for drivers with a blood alcohol level far above the legal limit.

Under the new measure, drivers convicted of being drunk while carrying passengers 15 years or younger could face up to four years in prison.

New York's embrace of interlocks for everyone convicted of drunken driving follows by just a month California's enactment of a similarly strict interlock pilot program. It is smart public policy.

Most people convicted of driving under the influence continue to drive even after their licenses are suspended. A recent study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, a nonprofit group financed by auto insurers, found that repeat drunken driving offenses dropped 65 percent among those with interlock devices.

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## Beyond reducing alcohol-related crashes in New York, Albany's toughening of penalties for drunken driving should prompt other states to follow suit.

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