

Senate Committee: Approves tougher drunk driving bills

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Madison – Wisconsin is a step closer to safer roads. On Wednesday, the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety unanimously approved six bills authored by State Senator Alberta Darling and State Representative Jim Ott to help curb drunk driving. Representative Ott says he hopes the bills will help deter drunk driving.

“I do think it will cause some people to change their behavior and make the decision ‘I don’t want to be in that situation,’ and not get behind the wheel.”

There were approximately 22,000 convictions for drunken driving offenses in Wisconsin in 2017. The six bills passed by the committee should help lower the number of drunk driving offenses.

[Senate Bill 6](#) Our state isn’t experiencing much of a decrease in 5th and 6th OWI offenders. Currently, OWI offenders in this category are required to be incarcerated for at least six months. It is my hope Senate Bill 6 will deter individuals from getting behind the wheel intoxicated by increasing the mandatory minimum to 18 months in prison. With the expansion of treatment and diversion programs and other alternatives, it is my hope that Senate Bill 6 will never have to be used.

[Senate Bill 7](#) / [Assembly Bill 15](#) makes first-time drunk driving offenders appear in court. Not only is a first-time offense not a crime in our state, but offenders also don’t even have to show up to face the charge.

[Senate Bill 8](#) / [Assembly Bill 17](#) creates a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in prison for committing homicide while driving drunk. If a judge believes that sentence is too harsh, they must put their reasons in writing.

[Senate Bill 345](#) addresses a tactic used to delay prosecution, sometimes resulting in a prior charge being dropped or a pending case being improperly charged. This legislation fixes that problem by increasing the statute of limitations for OWI arrests and prosecutions, from two years to three years for a first offense, and from three years to six years for the second and third offense. This would decrease the

incentive for offenders to delay prosecution to prevent proper charging, and help our justice system operate more effectively.

State Senator Alberta Darling says it is time to stop the state's drinking problem. "While we are making progress on curbing drunk driving in our state, I hope these bills will help deter everyone from getting behind a wheel after drinking," Darling said, "For too long, we've looked the other way and protected drunk drivers from their crimes. These bills will change that attitude."

The bills now head to the full State Senate for further consideration.