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NEWS RELEASE

Ignition Interlock Pilot Program for DWI Offenders with Revoked Licenses Launched in Hennepin County

For Immediate Release

Minneapolis (September 6, 2007) – A pilot program now underway in Hennepin County will allow offenders who’ve had their driver’s licenses revoked due to multiple DWI convictions to get their licenses back earlier, if they agree to install an ignition interlock device in their car.

An ignition interlock is a device placed in a car which requires the driver to blow into the device before the car will start. The device is a deep lung breath analyzer, and if it measures alcohol in the driver’s breath, the car won’t start.

Forty-five states have laws either authorizing or requiring the use of ignition interlock for repeat DWI offenders, and in 20 states, the device is mandatory. The 2007 Minnesota Legislature chose two counties, Hennepin and Beltrami to test an ignition interlock program in this state. In July, the Minnesota Department of Public Safety certified the first ignition interlock provider enabling the pilot project to get underway.

“Ignition interlock devices may prove to increase safety for all of us,” said Lucy Wieland, chief judge, Fourth Judicial District- Hennepin County District Court. “While DWI offenders get their licenses revoked, it’s estimated that 75% of these drivers continue to drive without a valid license and insurance. And, each year alcohol-related crashes injure more than 250,000 people in this country at an estimated cost of more than \$115 billion annually.”

The new pilot in Hennepin County is available to most repeat DWI offenders. Here’s how it works: current law sets the length of time a DWI offender’s driver’s license will be revoked based on prior DWI offenses. Under

the ignition interlock pilot, those time periods can be reduced if an offender agrees to use the device. For example, right now a person who gets a second DWI offense and also has a blood alcohol test result over .20, or refuses a blood alcohol test, loses their driver's license for 180 days. Under the new pilot program, if the driver agrees to install the ignition interlock in his car, he can get his license back in 60 days.

Prior to the new program, Hennepin County had initiated an ignition interlock pilot as part of its DWI Court specifically for offenders with multiple DWI offenses who have had their licenses cancelled as "inimical" to public safety. Such offenders must not only wait for one to two years to be eligible to get their licenses reinstated, they must complete conditions such as alcohol treatment to be considered for reinstatement. Under the pilot programs, if such an offender is in DWI court, and agrees to the ignition interlock device, he can get his license back in half the normal time.

Ignition interlock devices incorporate several safety checks to try to prevent cheating. They require rolling retests so that the driver can't have someone blow for him, and some of the devices also have a camera that records who is blowing into the device. The device also records data on the breath test, as well as other information regarding how often the car is used and miles driven, which is then downloaded into a computer system for analysis. This allows probation officers to monitor whether the offender is using alcohol or is trying to bypass the device.

The two-county legislative pilot program is scheduled to last for two years.

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