



NEWS RELEASE

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A bill is being proposed for the 2012 legislative session which, if passed, would more than double current sentence ranges for individuals who are convicted in drunken-driving fatalities.

Citing inadequate sentence ranges in such cases, King County Prosecutor Dan Satterberg, Washington State Representative Christopher Hurst and Pierce County Prosecutor Mark Lindquist have announced their support for House Bill 2216 which would increase substantially a first-time sentence on a vehicular homicide conviction, which is currently at 31 to 41 months in prison. The proposed new range is 78 to 102 months, making it consistent with a sentence for manslaughter first degree.

"A criminal sentence is supposed to punish the offender and protect the community," Satterberg said. "For drunk drivers who kill, our current law accomplishes neither goal," he added.

Rep. Hurst, who is Chair of the House Public Safety Committee, was also a police officer for 25 years. "I've seen the terrible carnage at these collision scenes and know the immeasurable suffering of surviving family members because some idiot chose to drive drunk," Hurst said. "It's time that we made the punishment fit the crime."

Pierce County Prosecutor Mark Lindquist supports the increased penalties. "A vehicle is a dangerous weapon, especially in the hands of a drunk, and tougher sentences are needed for drunks who kill with cars," Lindquist said.

The legislation also calls for an increase in the sentence ranges for vehicular homicides based on reckless driving or disregard for the safety of others, and vehicular assault. The current sentence range for a vehicular homicide based on reckless driving is 21 - 27 months in prison, but the new range would increase to 51 - 68 months. A vehicular homicide under disregard for the safety of others would increase from the current 15 - 20 months to a new range of 21 - 27 months. For drunk drivers convicted of vehicular assault, the current range of 3 - 9 months would increase to 6 - 12 months.

Washington State Senator David Frockt, who is a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, is also planning to introduce a vehicular homicide bill in the State Senate in early January aimed at increasing the sentence ranges in drunken-driving fatalities.

"The current sentence range is simply out of alignment with what justice requires given the senseless deaths and destroyed families that flow from the reckless choice to get behind the wheel while hammered," Frockt said. "Given the incredible number of public awareness campaigns after all these years on TV and radio, people know, or should know, how reckless a decision it is to drink and drive," he added. Frockt said 13 co-sponsors have already lined up to support such a bill.

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