

**House Bill No. 46
1/20/2005
Diane J. Rieger**

Madame Chairperson and members of the committee

On March 20, 2000, my life was blown to pieces and my heart was ripped from my chest. My beloved child, my firstborn daughter, Andrea Vaughn Rieger Hodge, was hit and killed by a drunk driver in Big Sky, MT.

A drunk driver who had been drinking and driving for more than 20 years. A drunk driver who had many dui's on his record. A drunk driver who was never taken off the roads killed my beloved daughter that beautiful spring night.

It is impossible for me to tell you in this short time who she was and the Light she was in this world. It is impossible for me to tell you what our family is like today without her here. But I will try. Andrea LOVED life more than anyone I knew. Shortly after she graduated from college in Minnesota, she moved to Big Sky to work and enjoy the mountains she had always loved. She called me one day and said, "mom guess what I did last night?" As she was always doing something adventurous, I never knew quite what to expect. I said "what honey, what did you do last night". She said, "well it was such a beautiful night, that I drove up into the mountains, turned the radio on in my car, and danced on the mountain top". I said, "all alone, weren't you scared". And she said, "oh no mom, I am not scared in the mountains".

Little did she know that beautiful 1st day of spring on March 20th, in the mountains that she loved, and where she felt so safe, that there was a killer on the road, and that her life would end after a day of skiing and dinner with friends. Little did she know that as she came around the curve that night, with her seat belt on, driving below the speed limit, that Anthony Miller, after drinking and driving all that day, would come careening around the curve at over 80 mph and well over .24 bac and smash her head on and kill her instantly. Little did we know when we went to bed that night, that our phone would ring at 1:00 in the morning telling us our beautiful precious and oh so loved child was DEAD, killed by a drunk driver. Little did we know of the horror that was to come and the loss that we would live with every moment of every day for the rest of our lives.

And now after almost 5 years in prison Anthony Miller is coming up for parole. If he is paroled, and it is a very real possibility that he will be, he will be released on the day he killed her, March 20th. And I am TERRIFIED of what will happened when he is released. I have two daughters left with me on this earth. I fear EVERY day of the danger they are in EVERY SINGLE TIME they get in their cars.

We, all of us here and all of our loved ones, are subjected to terrorism because of those in this beautiful state who do not take seriously the very real dangers of drinking and driving.

I ask you to think of the person you love most in YOUR life and imagine their life being snuffed out because of someone's CHOICE to drink and drive. Imagine living without them for the rest of your life because of a choice to drink and drive, possibly causing death or serious injury, a death that is 100% preventable.

I ask you to seriously consider making Montana one of the hardest states for those who continue to make this choice. I ask you to state the seriousness of this crime by calling it what it is, vehicular homicide, and giving this murder a life sentence, It is incomprehensible to me that Andrea's loved ones have been given a life sentence but the man who CHOSE to drink and drive for more than 20 years until he killed my daughter, possibly only 5 years!!!!!!!

And most importantly I ask that upon release, if the killer is caught driving impaired, it is absolutely a felony.

Judge Olson, who sentenced the man who killed my daughter said in his closing statements, "We as a society have permitted this to happen. "We have turned our highways into alleys of death."

I ask you to make Montana a state where it is safe for our children to live in, where we never have to go to bed at night, wondering if we will ever see our children alive again. Where those who choose to drink KNOW that Montana is not the place to drive in. where children grow up KNOWING it is something there is zero tolerance for. Where we truly are the last best place.

Thank you.