SENATE Judiciary
Exhibit No. 3
Date 4/8/15
Bill No. HB 202

MISSOULIAN EDITORIAL

A chance to support DUI task forces

For nearly 30 years, the Missoula County DUI Task Force has been bringing Missoulians of all walks of life together to fight against drunken driving. Like the 33 other state-approved DUI task forces in Montana, it does this by waging education campaigns, providing responsible alcohol sales and service training, and by promoting programs that offer people a way to get home safely if they've had too much to drink.

And it does all this on a budget of less than $100,000 a year, raised entirely through the collection of fees paid by DUI offenders when their licenses are reinstated.

It's a good bet that many more Missoulians would be willing to lend their financial support to such a worthy – and effective – endeavor. Fortunately, this legislative session a state representative from Missoula has introduced legislation to make that possible.

Rep. Bryce Bennett, a Missoula Democrat representing House District 91, introduced House Bill 202 to help raise additional funding for county task forces in Montana by allowing people to make a donation when registering a vehicle. The voluntary option would provide the option of of giving $1 or more to county DUI task forces.

Current law already allows those registering a vehicle to choose to donate to organ donation awareness and traumatic brain injury awareness. Adding the option of financially supporting county DUI task forces seems sensible and relevant.

After all, Montanans with registered vehicles have a strong incentive to make Montana's roads as safe as possible, and county DUI task forces share that goal. Task forces in recent years have been able to note some measure of success as the overall rate of alcohol-related vehicle crashed declined.

Like Montana's rate, Missoula's rate of alcohol-involved vehicle accidents has been trending downward. According to the latest report for fiscal year 2014, Missoula County logged a total of 282 such crashes in 2009, for a rate of more than 11 percent. The next year, 2010, saw 237 crashes, for a rate closer to 10 percent, and by 2011, the number had fallen to 195 – a rate of less than 9 percent. This steady decrease is a good indication that the dollars invested in this task force are working

That's the good news. The bad news is that the reduced number of crashes did not correspond to a reduced number of fatalities. In 2009, there were seven alcohol-related fatalities. In 2010, there were eight. And in 2011, there were seven.

That's too many for our county of less than 112,000 residents. Indeed, despite improvement in Montana's alcohol-related fatality rate, it remains one of the highest rates in the nation.

HB 202 is scheduled for its first hearing with the House Transportation Committee on Friday, Jan. 23. Let the members of the House Transportation committee know that you support the option to help support county DUI task forces.

CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATOR

Find your state legislators' direct contact information online at *http://leg.mt.gov*, or by calling the Information Desk at the Montana Capitol at 406-444-4800. Mail can also be addressed to individual senators at the Montana Senate, P.O. Box 200500, Helena, MT 59620-0500; or to individual representatives at the Montana House of Representatives, P.O. Box 200400, Helena, MT 59620-0400.

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