

# A fair punishment

Law



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On the morning of April 21st, 2009, my biology teacher gave me, and the rest of the class, some terrible news. She told us that my high school classmate and friend, Major Washington, had been killed in a car accident the previous night. I later learned that Major, and his mother Sylvia Porter, had been hit by a drunk driver on their way to return a movie. The man behind the wheel was driving with a suspended license, and his blood-alcohol level was at . 8, which is three times the legal limit. This was not his first drunk driving offense. Suspending someone's license on their first drunk driving offense is not a strong enough punishment. I believe that this tragedy could have been avoided if this man was in a place where he could not drink, and in a place where he could not get behind the wheel of a car. In order to avoid tragedies like this one, drunk drivers should be imprisoned on their first offense for one year. The opposition may argue that prison is meant for criminals only.

Sending someone to prison, after they made one mistake, is wrong. A first time offender of driving while under the influence does not belong in prison. Prison is a place for those who have been charged with a serious criminal offense. This is true to a certain extent. However, drunk driving is a dangerous and deadly behavior no what offense it is. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration suggests the stiffer penalties for first-time high-BAC (blood alcohol content) offenders should be comparable to those applied to repeat offenders (NCSL 8).

Associated essay: "Shame is Worth a Try" Summary

These penalties include longer license suspension terms, longer prison sentences, higher fines, installation of an ignition interlock, and treatment for  
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alcohol abuse (NCSL 8). The NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) recognizes the seriousness of impaired driving. Drivers with high blood alcohol content are at a greater risk of car accidents, injuries, and even death. Stricter penalties must be implemented. A first time offender should not be put into prison for what can legitimately be called a mistake. Whether it's a first time offender, second, or even third time offender, they are all equally dangerous.

When the argument arises that a person should not be imprisoned on their first offense of drunk driving, I simply ask the question: what if they get into an accident? If the accident results in the death of another person, that first time offender is going to prison for a long time. He or she does not belong in prison if they managed to get pulled over and arrested, but does that same person belong in prison if they hit and kill someone? According to the law, they do. If a person kills someone while driving under the influence, it is not going to matter what offense it is, they are going to prison.

Imprisonment on the first offense of drunk driving will help to diminish the amount of “ mistakes” people continuously make when they choose to get behind the wheel of a car. People may argue that first time offenders are able to get into treatment because they are more willing to plead to it, when they're not going to be convicted of a crime. David J. Hanson, Ph. D. supports treatment by saying “ providing effective treatment is essential to reducing hardcore drunk driving because, regardless of the punishment imposed, offenders will eventually begin driving again.

The only way to prevent offenders from drinking and driving is treatment that brings about fundamental changes in behavior. ” I believe that  
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treatment can work to an extent, but it primarily depends on the person. It may work for some people, but not for all. By implementing the law of imprisonment on the first offense of drunk driving, a message will be sent that behavior of that nature will not be tolerated, and there will be no second chances. I believe that the fear of imprisonment can ultimately help decrease drunk-driving statistics.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, in 2010, more than 10, 000 people died in alcohol-impaired driving crashes. In 2011, 9, 878 people were killed in alcohol-impaired crashes. The numbers have steadily decreased, but not enough. By establishing a law that says first time offenders of drunk driving shall be imprisoned for one year, fatalities and arrests will decrease even more. I believe that the fear of being imprisoned will also help decrease drunk driving statistics.

Putting someone in prison will make he or she realize the mistake they made, and that they do not belong in that kind of environment. According to the NHTSA, alcohol-impaired motor vehicle crashes cost more than an estimated 37 billions dollars annually. By implementing this law, expenses related to drunk driving crashes can also decrease over time. When pulled over for driving drunk, drivers should be imprisoned on the first offense for one year. If this law were implemented, alcohol-impaired related deaths would decrease, as would the amount of arrests.

Tragedies like the one that involved my friend, would be avoided. Suspending a person's license is not a strong enough punishment because it does not ensure that he or she will not drive a car. The man in my story who caused the accident had a suspended license, yet he was still able to get

behind the wheel of a car. The decision he made that night resulted in a haunting tragedy for many people. It would not have happened had he been put in prison on his first offense.