



# DAVE MAXEY

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 83<sup>RD</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## Testimony on Assembly Bill 143

Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

April 9, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Spiros and committee members, for hearing Assembly Bill 143.

I am before you today with a heavy heart, not only as a representative of a victim of an unimaginable tragedy but also as a voice for those who have suffered from preventable acts of negligence.

On November 21, 2021, a mother's decision to let her son borrow her vehicle became the cause of disaster. Darrell Brooks Jr., driving with a suspended license, took that car and turned it into a weapon at the Waukesha Christmas parade. Six innocent lives were claimed, and 62 others were left injured, their lives irreversibly altered.

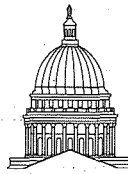
This act of devastation could have been prevented, and it's this reality that drives me to appear before you with this testimony. At the request of my constituents, I introduced Assembly Bill 143, which increases penalties for vehicle owners who allow someone to drive without a valid license.

Currently, vehicle owners can hand over their car keys without ever verifying whether the person behind the wheel is legally permitted to drive. This lack of accountability creates unnecessary risks for innocent people. In many cases, vehicle owners are unaware that the driver they've trusted is unlicensed or has a revoked license. This is a problem.

Under the bill, penalties for vehicle owners who allow someone to drive without a valid license are increased. For a first offense, the fine would rise to \$1,000, with repeat offenses leading to fines of up to \$10,000. Without this change, there's no real accountability for vehicle owners who unknowingly let unlicensed drivers behind the wheel.

It doesn't matter if the vehicle owner knew the person wasn't allowed to drive; the owner would still be held accountable. This bill encourages responsibility and helps protect the public from drivers who shouldn't be on the road.

**The message behind this is very simple: we will not tolerate unlicensed drivers on our roads, and we will hold those who enable them accountable.** Every action we take to prevent unlicensed drivers from operating vehicles makes Wisconsin a safer place for everyone.



**JULIAN BRADLEY**  
WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

**Assembly Bill 143**  
**Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety**  
**April 9, 2025**

Thank you, Chairman Spiros and members of the committee for hearing Assembly Bill 143 (AB 143) and for accepting my testimony on the bill's behalf.

Every day in this country, people who don't have a drivers license or who have had their license suspended or revoked climb behind the wheel of a car, take to the road, and are involved in a fatal accident. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that in a three-year period, these drivers accounted for more than 11.5% of fatal accidents.

Too often, these invalid drivers get access to a vehicle from a friend or relative – someone who might know they shouldn't be driving, but who aren't dissuaded by Wisconsin's lenient penalties. Currently, someone who allows an unlicensed driver to operate their motor vehicle is assessed a fine of under \$100. This does not operate as much of a deterrent. AB 143 aims to fix that.

By increasing penalties for a first offense to \$1,000 and for multiple offenses to \$10,000, this bill aims to stop those who might think it's no big deal to lend, rent, or otherwise provide a vehicle to someone who shouldn't be driving.

There's an old adage that I'm sure we've all heard many times; an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Put another way, it's better to stop a problem before it starts. If we can stop would-be unlicensed drivers from accessing a vehicle, then we won't have to deal with the heartbreak that occurs in the aftermath of a fatal accident – or, in the case of the Waukesha Christmas parade, an intentional act that turned into an unspeakable tragedy.

I hope you'll join Rep. Maxey and I by supporting this bill to strengthen our laws and make our roads safer. Thank you.

Good Afternoon Committee Members,

My name is Tyler Pudleiner. I would like to thank Chairman Spiros for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. Thank you to Representative Maxey for inviting me to speak on 2025 Assembly Bill 143.

To give the committee some background, I was run over and severely injured by Darrell E. Brooks Jr. in the 2021 Waukesha Christmas Parade Attack, while marching with the Waukesha South High School Band. The SUV (2010 Red Ford Escape) that Mr. Brooks drove through the route, was owned legally by his mother, Dawn Woods.

As you may recall, the Waukesha community witnessed the loss of six lives and the injuring of sixty-seven (67) others. The trauma the community endured is immeasurable. Shortly before the parade, on November 21st, 2021 (11-21-21), I turned seventeen (17). I was beginning my Junior year of high school. Without getting into too many details of the injuries I sustained, I was rushed into emergency surgery the evening of the attack, where they were unable to close the surgical site and had to keep me in a medically induced coma until Monday afternoon, where they were then able to finish the surgery and close the site. I remained in the hospital until Saturday. My recovery required a minimum of eight (8) weeks of no lifting more than 8 lbs. and limited bending. I was not able to return to school full-time until March of 2022.

Even though I was cleared from my post surgery restrictions, my other injuries limited my return to the 2022 Spring Varsity Baseball season. Throughout the rest of 2022, I endured twenty-six (26) medical procedures. Following the conclusion of the criminal trial in October 2022, I had my third surgery for one of my most significant injuries.

When Representative Maxey reached out to me in regards to Bill 143, I felt grateful for the opportunity to share my story. During the preparation for the trial, it was explained to us that Mr. Brooks had a suspended license. However, in doing some research with my family, we discovered that Mr. Brooks' license had numerous contacts with the criminal justice system pertaining to unlawful operation of a motor vehicle. Additionally, during the trial, there were music videos played that featured Mr. Brooks in front of the SUV.

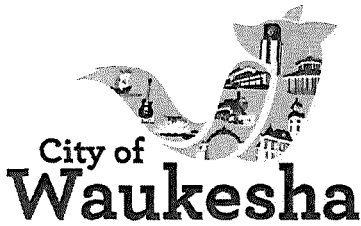
In July of 2020, Mr. Brooks was arrested and a no contact order was issued between him and his mother. He was released on bond on that matter in February of 2021. On November 5, 2021, Mr. Brooks was arrested again, for attempting to run over the mother of one of his children. In that matter, another no contact order was issued between him, the mother of his child, and Ms. Woods. He was released on a \$1,000 cash bond, somewhere between 11/11/21 and 11/19/21. Which after learning from testimony, that was paid by Ms. Woods, and that the mother of his child & Mr. Brooks were living in the SUV together on Ms. Woods property.

The proposed legislation, Assembly Bill 143 and Wisconsin statutes 343.45 (3) & 343.46 (4), would hold Ms. Woods accountable for allowing Brooks to use the SUV without a license. If the legislation were in existence at the time of Brooks' illegal driving offenses, his mother could also have received significant fines which could have prevented this Waukesha tragedy. Instead, after two (2) crimes being previously committed with the SUV, she finally reported it stolen on the night of 11/21/21, thereby removing herself and her insurance company from all possible consequences and any responsibility.

Hopefully, the revisions to these statutes will raise the awareness to law enforcement and with the higher fines, deter people from lending their vehicle to others without confirming the person is licensed to drive.

I strongly feel that if the maximum fines on statutes 343.45 (3) and 343.46 (4) had been higher along with the commitment of law enforcement and district attorneys across the state, pursuing the vehicle owners, like Bill 143 proposes, Ms. Woods may have felt compelled to not lend her vehicle to her unlicensed son, which could have prevented one of the worst mass casualty crimes in Wisconsin history and the devastation felt by the Waukesha community and beyond.

I am one story that has come out of the Waukesha Christmas Parade Attack, but there are many others across the state on a daily basis, that go through preventable incidents, including injuries and losses of life, because the current statutes only carry a maximum fine of no more than \$100, which in today's day and age, for some, is like pocket change. With the passing of Bill 143, and the fines increasing, hopefully this will send a message, and more of these crimes will become preventable.



## **POLICE DEPARTMENT**

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**DANIEL P. THOMPSON**

Chief of Police

April 8, 2025

### **Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 143**

Chief Daniel Thompson

City of Waukesha Police Department

To Whom It May Concern,

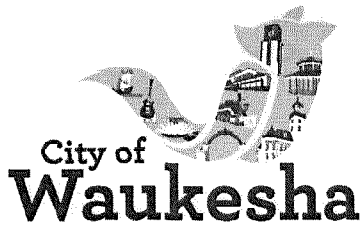
Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony on **Assembly Bill 143**. I also want to extend my sincere appreciation to Representative Maxey and Senator Bradley for their leadership in authoring this important legislation and addressing a critical public safety issue.

As the Chief of Police for the City of Waukesha—Wisconsin’s seventh-largest city, with a population of just over 70,000—I strongly support this bill. I have the privilege of leading a *dedicated team of law enforcement professionals who serve with integrity, honor, and courage.*

Every day, we confront the realities of roadway dangers, and it is clear that road safety must remain a top priority.

One of the growing concerns we face is the rise in incidents involving unlicensed or revoked drivers. These individuals pose a serious threat not only to themselves but to every other person on the road. Whether due to reckless behavior, lack of training, or a blatant disregard for the law, the risks they present are significant and far too common.

The horrific tragedy that occurred in Waukesha on November 21, 2021, underscores what is at stake. Darrell Brooks Jr., who was driving his mother’s vehicle with a suspended license, took the lives of six innocent people and injured 62 others during the Waukesha Christmas Parade.



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Chief of Police

This was an unthinkable act that devastated families and shook our entire community. It was also preventable.

Assembly Bill 143 takes a proactive step in preventing such tragedies. By holding vehicle owners accountable—whether they knowingly or unknowingly permit an unlicensed individual to operate their vehicle—we send a clear message: with vehicle ownership comes responsibility. The bill's proposed penalties—a \$1,000 fine for a first offense and up to \$10,000 for repeat violations—serve as a meaningful deterrent. It encourages diligence among vehicle owners and underscores the seriousness of allowing someone without a valid license to drive.

This is not just a Waukesha issue; this is a statewide concern. Communities across Wisconsin are grappling with the consequences of unlicensed driving, and we must act decisively to protect our residents.

In closing, I respectfully urge the committee to pass Assembly Bill 143. This legislation is a necessary and practical measure to promote accountability, strengthen public safety, and help prevent future tragedies on our roads.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

*Daniel Thompson*

CHIEF DANIEL P. THOMPSON  
WAUKESHA POLICE DEPARTMENT

Good Afternoon, my name is Chad Crull and this past November my family was touched by an event that could have ended in tragedy. While getting on the school bus, my youngest son was struck by a driver that was following too close to the bus, and not paying attention. While he is physically unharmed, the mark left on our family is not unnoticed. This driver, William Melcher, has a long history of driving infractions stemming from drinking.

Going back to 2011 when CCAP shows Mr. Melcher receiving his 3rd OWI, he was ordered to install an Ignition Interlock Device or IID. He was ticketed in 2012 for operating revoked, in 2015 for operating revoked, again in 2015 operating revoked. In 2016 he received his 4th OWI and was again ordered to install an IID, again in 2019 operating revoked and in 2021-operating revoked and failure to install IID, which was dismissed. In 2022 he was again ticketed for operating while revoked and failure to install IID which was again dismissed in favor of the guilty plea for operating revoked and court ordered an extension of the IID. Again in 2022 he was ticketed for operating without license and failure to install IID and found guilty of operating revoked and the charge for failure to install IID was again dismissed. He was also charged for two counts of bail jumping at this time and both were dismissed. One more time in 2022 he was ticketed for operating revoked and failure to install IID and a third time with bail jumping, only the revoked charge stayed. Recently, Mr. Melcher was again caught in October of 2024, when he got into an accident and was cited for operating revoked, failure to maintain control of vehicle and failure to install IID. Less than a month after losing control of his vehicle and the subsequent citations, he failed to maintain control of his vehicle and pay attention to the school bus right in front of him, he was too late to stop despite lights being activated more than 400 feet before our house and driving less than 40 mph. He went around the bus on the right side and plowed into my 6 year old son who was getting on with his older brother just behind him.

Throughout these instances I've listed, Mr. Melcher has driven 5 different vehicles with 7 different license plates. I have placed a request with the DMV to determine ownership of these plates and vehicles. Of note, the same vehicle that was involved in the 2011 OWI is the same vehicle that struck my son and it is not registered to Mr. Melcher but rather to his sister. What about the other vehicles that he was cited for failure to install IID? There are 3 different vehicles that he was operating illegally without an IID and I can say that 1 was for certain not registered to him. What about the other two, who do they belong to? The bill that is being proposed would create a stiff penalty for owners who provide their vehicle to drivers who are not able to legally operate them. After a stiff \$1000 fine, would you lend your car to a friend or family member who is supposed to have an IID? This bill will disincentivize owners from illegally lending vehicles, and remove opportunities for these illegal drivers to hurt our loved ones. We need to stop the enablers. The people who are dangerous and refuse to abide by the law, can have their access to vehicles restrained by firmly penalizing those who knowingly provide it. I urge you all to consider the good this bill can do, preventing more tragedies

that are all too common and SO preventable.