

Testimony of Amy L. Huther
SB 2124, An Act Relative to Drowsy Driving
30 September 2005

Good morning.

My name is Amy Huther from Milford MA.

I came here today to share with the committee the story of how a drowsy driver cut short the life of Major Robert Raneri, an Army Reserve Soldier who, on June 26, 2002, was serving his country in support of Operation Noble Eagle when he was killed by a 19-year old man who admittedly was awake for over 24 hours.

Major Raneri was a great Soldier and leader and he is sorely missed. I will always remember the volume of Soldiers; junior enlisted to general officers, who stood in line to pay their final respects to their fallen comrade at the wake, the standing room only crowd of mourners at the funeral and the procession to the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne which stretched for miles down 495 to Cape Cod.

In an instant, a drowsy driver took the life of Major Raneri, an officer who many thought was destined to be a general in the Army Reserve, an officer who, as a Captain, commanded the 94th Military Police Company for 5 years, culminating in a 9-month deployment to Bosnia, an officer who, when he returned from that deployment, was determined to commit his life to serving his country.

Prior to his death, he had been selected to serve full time as an Active Reserve Soldier, and offered positions in force protection for the US Army. At the time of his death, he was serving as the Provost Marshal and Acting Director of Plans and Training at Devens Reserve Forces Training Area.

The day he died, he was driving to Devens for what should have been his last day of work prior to his wedding, which was to be on July 3, 2002. One can only imagine the happiness, joy and excitement he was feeling that morning as he left his house.

I know what he was feeling that morning because the house he left was our home. I'll never forget hearing his motorcycle drive out of our driveway and the smile it brought to my face knowing that he was happier than he had ever been in his life and anticipating our wedding, just seven days away. A wedding we had planned for over a year, our dream wedding that would unite our family and our destiny, everything was going to be perfect and we both couldn't wait to share our lives together and to start a family.

Because of a drowsy driver, our wedding plans changed to funeral plans. Groomsmen became pall bearers and instead of walking down the aisle on the

arm of my father in a white gown, I wore a black dress and was assisted down the aisle by Command Sergeant Major Joseph Scunziano, Rob's best friend and best man. Instead of a proud and happy groom waiting at the altar with open arms, I was met by a flag draped coffin. Two days before our wedding, I buried my groom in the uniform that he purchased to wear at our wedding and the wedding ring that he chose to represent our love. Eight and a half months before her birth, I buried my daughter's father.

What killed Rob was not an accident. It was a crash caused by a driver who admittedly was awake for over 24 hours and made a conscious choice to get behind the wheel of a vehicle – a vehicle that quickly turned into a weapon resulting in the death of an innocent victim.

The National Sleep Foundation has a website dedicated to the prevention of Drowsy Driving. On that website, you will learn that 18 hours without sleep has the same physiological effect on the body as a .05% Blood Alcohol Concentration, and 24 hours without sleep is equivalent to a 0.1% Blood Alcohol Concentration or the level of legal intoxication in most states.

On June 23, 2003, the state of New Jersey passed a bill, known as "Maggie's Law." The law establishes fatigued driving as recklessness under the existing vehicular homicide statute. This is the first law in the nation, which specifically addresses the issue of driving while fatigued. "Fatigue," under this law is defined as being without sleep for a period in excess of 24 consecutive hours.

The public needs to be educated on the effects of drowsy driving. I believe that we need to enact stricter laws and penalties, which punish people who drive drowsy and cause a crash, or worse, kill other innocent motorists and/or pedestrians. I believe that such laws will encourage education and prevent individuals from making the choice to put peoples' lives at risk by operating a motor vehicle when they are knowingly impaired due to sleep deprivation. If passing this bill saves just one life; allows one daughter to know and love her father; allows one bride to marry her groom; allows brothers to share in each other's lives; allows a mother and father to watch their son grow into an adult and raise his own family, then doesn't it make sense?