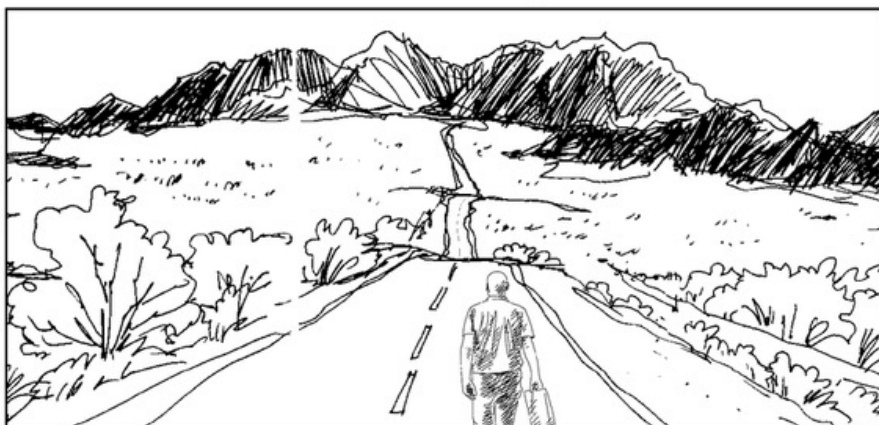




LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD: ON THE FRONTLINES OF ROAD SAFETY AT THE CAPITAL

ADA MAUREEN MCCORMICK: "WE CAN'T LOSE HOPE."

By William Aiken Jr.



Maureen McCormick, Suffolk County
Special Assistant District Attorney

Closing a loophole in the law that benefits the powerful is a tough nut to crack. Nobody understands this reality better than Suffolk County ADA Maureen McCormick. She's taken on the powers that be with her Deadly Driving bill, which prevents impaired drivers from falling through the cracks in our criminal justice system. The bill holds impaired drivers fully accountable for their actions.

McCormick was featured (Road Safety Warriors Fight Legislative Morass) in the 2024 RID Spring newsletter. Through her resiliency and resourcefulness, she'd built a diverse coalition to get the Deadly Driving bill across the finish line and on to Governor Hochul's desk to sign. However, despite her extraordinary efforts getting the bill passed remains a challenge. In this interview, Maureen took the time amid her full schedule to explain what the bill does and details those challenges she faces.

1) When you were going to law school, there were many options available as to which aspect of our criminal justice system to pursue. What made you decide to represent victims of DUI/DWI?

I had no intention of becoming a "vehicular crimes" prosecutor. I wanted to be "vanilla" like everyone else in my "class" of more than 70 new Assistant DAs in the Brooklyn DA's Office thirty-nine years ago. I wanted to prosecute the "bad guys" - the violent felony offenders and intentional

homicides. I was, what I now refer to, as a "murder snob". I prosecuted those crimes but I was also assigned to prosecute DWIs and then vehicle-related assaults and homicides too. That was it for me.

I came to realize that the victims of vehicular crimes were truly random and innocent. Their families had no warning that when they left the house that day, they would never return. The violence inflicted on them during a crash remains inconceivable. That very real risk of brutal violence is what the impaired driver chooses to ignore when they drive. It is not an "accident". It is criminal.

2) Can you explain the deadly driving bill to our readers?

Most people cannot believe that New York allows dangerously impaired drivers to escape responsibility - regardless of how seriously impaired they are - when law enforcement can't say what substance is impairing them or it is not on the Public Health Law 3306 "list". There are even police officers, troopers and sheriffs who don't recognize this loophole exists. But in every corner of New York, if the driver doesn't admit what he or she are using or refuses a chemical test, the case will have to be dismissed.

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NOTICE:

RID's newsletter is now online! Those who don't have access to a computer call (518) 729-8187 and we will send the newsletter via snail mail. If you want to support the work RID does, please send a donations by visiting RID's Paypal account at www.rid-usa.org OR write to: RID-USA, PO Box 520 Schenectady, NY 12301

THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER:

EFFICIENT GOVERNANCE VALUES THE MERIT OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

By William Aiken Jr.



*Rep. Elise Stefanik
Formidable Challenger*



*NY Gov. Kathy Hochul
Establishment Status Quo*



Since taking over as RID president in 2012, I have dealt with several New York Governors on drunken driving legislation. A good indicator of each administration has been the system they deploy for interacting with the public. There has been a stark difference between the last two governors.

When I would call Governor Andrew Cuomo's office, I was always greeted by a live agent.

Then I was assigned a reference number so my call could be expedited and easily updated in the future. The agents were knowledgeable and able to answer questions. You got the feeling that Governor Cuomo cared that people took the time to call. He valued us.

I've had a few issues with Governor Cuomo. His decision to put Covid patients into nursing homes was an unmitigated disaster. He had some questionable unethical behavior as well. But my experience with his replacement left me longing for a return to Cuomo.

I gave Governor Hochul three months to give her a chance to get up to speed with taking over as the new governor. Then over the next nine months, I called her office three times and left voice messages. No one ever bothered to return my calls. So I gave up in exasperation.

My focus is to establish a relationship with whoever the governor is. I try to persuade them to support the .05 bill. I am optimistic a new governor

might return to the customer service values of the Cuomo administration. A supportive Governor can use their bully pulpit to great effect.

Congresswoman Elise Stefanik doesn't have a long track record on drunken driving legislation. Yet, whenever that issue has come before her in terms of her vote, she's always made the correct call. Stefanik is likely to challenge Hochul in 2026. If she becomes Governor, having her on board with the .05 bill could be a game changer.

I've reached out to Stefanik's office to introduce RID and my concerns. The reception I got was positive. Her staff treated my inquiry as having merit. Stefanik has a track record of being proactive in taking on issues that concern the public. She demonstrated decisive leadership during televised Congressional hearings, holding powerful entities to account.

Doris fostered her reputation as someone who could effectively work across the isle (she was a Democrat). However, she never hesitated to call out either party if they were being obstructive to passing road safety legislation. I'm frustrated how partisan politics has made my job harder than it needs to be. Preventing drunk driving should unite us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Aiken".

*William Aiken, Jr., President
Remove Intoxicated Drivers*

Your donation helps RID save lives.

LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The result is that New York is not deterring these drivers before they crash and kill. The drivers are not receiving treatment, supervision, driver re-education, behavior modification, or, conviction license sanctions. There is nothing to stop the drivers from continuing to endanger themselves and others. New York's failure to address these dangerous drivers tacitly authorizes their behavior.

The Deadly Driving Bill's (S6485c/A3981c) primary goal is to save lives by allowing the prosecution of all drivers who are obviously too impaired to drive - regardless of the source of the intoxication. This is the identical standard applied to drunk drivers. Law enforcement doesn't have to name the type of alcohol they used and they don't get a "pass" when they refuse a test. It should not be different for drugs..

3) As someone who has been trying to pass a .05 BAC law in New York, it's been very useful that Utah has a .05 law on its books. It's helped to verify .05's life saving benefits as well as debunk the lies told by our adversaries.

Is there a state that you'd like to see New York emulate in regards to your own bill?

In the case of drugged driving, there is not just "one" other state to emulate, like Utah, in the heroic efforts to reduce New York's BAC. Forty-six states already have laws (with various wording) that include charges for driving while impaired by any impairing substance. New York is shamefully behind. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) sent a recommendation to Governor Hochul in 2023 that New York should fix the drugged driving loophole. It didn't happen. NHTSA has downgraded New York's Status as the states fatalities have skyrocketed in recent years.

Every statistic represents a family member, friend and community member.

4) How vital is it to have a Governor voice support for the deadly driving bill? When it comes to New York State, can a Governor get your bill across the finish line or are there other factors more important to the process?

The proponents of closing the drugged driving loophole were heartened and grateful when Governor Hochul included the proposal in her budget this past year. She never spoke about it publicly and it was omitted from the budget by the legislature. I believe the Governor's overt support of the bill with the legislative leaders from her own political party could be the push that is needed to get to a vote.

One of those leaders is Assembly Speaker, Carl Heastie. He controls the Assembly calendar. The legislative rules allow him to prevent a bill from being voted regardless of legislator support for the bill and without explanation.

5) You've lead a valiant effort in educating legislators and the public on the importance of road safety laws. Doris Aiken's motto: "You can make a difference" was very successful in galvanizing public support. What do you suggest that people can do, so they too can make a difference?

Thank you for the compliment. Doris' words mean more now than ever before. "You can make a difference". I have learned the hard way that the most effective tool with legislators is the in-person meeting in their districts or Albany offices. Direct phone calls can also be effective, followed by actual letters through the mail. Emails appear to be the least effective form of communication. (they are the easiest to ignore).

If I could ask your readers for anything, it would be to not lose hope and give in to the feeling that their efforts are not enough to bring change. It is so important that everyone does whatever they can to speak with as many (controlling) Democrat legislators as possible about passing the bill - regardless of whether they are the caller's representatives. When we all make these contacts, we are no longer individuals. We are a team countering the organized/funded opponents.

6) Thank you for taking the time amid your full schedule to do this interview. Any final thoughts you'd like to add before we close?

I want to thank you, William, RID and everyone for your support and efforts. I have been honored to do this work for so long. I sincerely wish that I had been able to get more of the needed changes done before my time has run out.

But above all, victims of crime have the right to expect their government to do everything possible to provide justice when someone has been harmed - especially since the law forbids victims from taking these matters into their own hands. The fair, even-handed and unbiased application of the law is what stands between a functioning society and anarchy.

Please remember that your voices matter. If you have been victimized, I am so sorry for your pain. The law-abiding residents of this state stand with you and also want change.



Your donation helps RID save lives.

RING A LOUD BELL

By Betty Martin

In 1983, as our NYS legislators debated the minimum purchase age for alcohol, Doris Aiken and I stood outside the NYS legislative chamber and rolled out a manuscript that contained hundreds of names of victims. As the legislators left the chamber, they were faced with stepping over, around or stepping on the scroll.

In the silence one could sense the voices of loved ones. "Her life was snuffed out in a mere moment, he lives with pain every day as his body tries to heal the broken bones and torn muscles. Its okay baby, go to sleep. Mommy loves you." as life leaves her four year old body and her five old cousin lies in the morgue, the unanswerable WHY, as they come for her kidneys, her eyes."

It seems impossible to go on with our lives in the wake of such tragedy. But we continue as we never have before. We are more than survivor victims. We are strength, we are hope, we are a force for change, and we fill the voices for those that live within us. A judge once told me, "Forgive As you will. But do not forget. Go out, ring a loud bell, change will not come if we do not make our voices heard."

The times we live in these days seem fragmented. Daily we are bombarded with stories of discontent. Innocent children are gunned down as they pray on the first day of school, masked agents appear in our shops and neighborhoods, protest demonstrations have become a familiar occurrence.

So it is of little notice that a Gansevoort woman, a repeat DWI offender had a blood alcohol content three times the legal limit when she was stopped for reckless driving with a 15 year old in her vehicle. (wnyt.com)

We've made changes in our laws following the day Doris and I stood outside the legislative chamber. The minimum purchase age (21) passed. Nationally, the legal BAC levels were lowered from .10 to .08, penalties have increased substantially. We have

designated drivers, ride sharing services such as Uber and Lyft, ignition interlocks on cars.

Yet, the death toll from impaired/DWI drivers remains at one fatality every 39 minutes. Until we achieve our goals we must demand greater effort. We are the change, the voices that will save lives. Please reach out to legislators to support stronger laws, speak out at schools, community forums, continue to educate our communities on the importance of driving sober. Ring a loud bell!



© Tom Heffernan Sr.

Outside Albany Courthouse. Albany, NY.

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THEY SHALL BE SORELY MISSED

RENEE BARCHITTA'S FINAL WORDS



A sunny, cloudless sky was the backdrop for the memorial of Renee Barchitta held in her backyard garden. I drove 90 miles to get there on a cruise control set at 40 MPH (my car is 16 years old). The trip was well worth it. Rene's friends and family shared their love and experiences with Rene in front of a small group gathered to mourn her.

A consistent theme echoed by those who reflected on Rene's life. They talk about her strong faith in Jesus Christ. I've known Rene for 40 years. But our relationship rose to another level once I turned my life over to Christ. Knowing how we operated under the same playbook of God's scripture unified us in our thoughts, values and spirit.

Another commonality was Rene's selflessness. She was always looking for opportunities to give a shout out to those deserving of credit. Renee alerted me to the story of a female police officer, who was injured by a drunken driver. She fought through rehab to get back on the job. RID honored her with an award citing her valor and bravery. Without Renee, I would have missed an opportunity to acknowledge such a great officer in the community.

Rene lived life to its fullness. She never allowed regret to linger. She always persevered. I have sorely missed her ever since she left us too soon. She was with RID from the beginning. Her and Doris were cut from the same cloth. She was one of a kind. Here are Rene's final words, written to those fortunate enough to have known her:

One life is all we have,
And we live it as we
Believe living it, and
Then it's gone.
But to surrender what you are,
And live without belief
That's more terrible than dying
It is better to be alone with God,
His friendship will not fail me,
Nor is his counsel, nor his love.
In his strength, I will dare and
Dare and dare until I die.

MARION MAE ROCCO 1932-2025



Marion Mae Rocco Glenville - Marion Mae Rocco, 93, passed away peacefully in the presence of her family on August 9, 2025. She was 93. Marion was predeceased by her loving husband Bill.

Bill and Marion were members of RID from the beginning, joining in 1980. They were a staple at RID many events, including press conferences and court watching of trials. As a board member, Marion was the quiet one. But when she spoke, it came from a place of good faith and common sense. Her value as a peacemaker couldn't be underestimated. On a rare occasion when meetings got heated, Marion was able to lower the temperature by being a good listener with an ability to give both sides, the benefit of the doubt.

Marion offered her home for RID board meetings. She always created a warm and welcoming atmosphere, where everyone felt at ease. She showcased her baking skills serving delicious cookies and pastries. Meetings at Marion's house never felt rushed. We were always successful in resolving the agenda before us thanks to Marion's patience. Right up to the end, she was engaged with the issues.

Marion's faith was central to her life. At her service, there were 11 hymns sung by over 200 mourners in attendance. The minister leading the program, quoted scripture, illuminating Marion's values, with a strong commitment to obeying the word of God.

Marion is survived by her children: Ann Klotz, Karen Suttie (William), William Rocco (Barbara), and Maria LaTorre (Richard). Marion had eight grandchildren, and eight great grandchildren

She will be sorely missed by her large family and by all those who were fortunate enough to have known her.

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