

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5002

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As Reported by Senate Committee On:  
Law & Justice, January 19, 2023

**Title:** An act relating to alcohol concentration.

**Brief Description:** Concerning alcohol concentration.

**Sponsors:** Senators Lovick, Lias, Dhingra, Kuderer, McCune, Nguyen, Rolfes, Shewmake, Valdez, Wilson, C., Wilson, J. and Wilson, L..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Law & Justice: 1/16/23, 1/19/23 [DPS-TRAN, w/oRec].

**Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill**

- Reduces the breath or blood alcohol concentration limit for operating a motor vehicle from 0.08 to 0.05.
- Reduces the breath or blood alcohol concentration limit for physical control of a motor vehicle from 0.08 to 0.05.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5002 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Transportation.

Signed by Senators Dhingra, Chair; Padden, Ranking Member; Kuderer, McCune, Pedersen, Valdez, Wagoner and Wilson, L.

**Minority Report:** That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Trudeau, Vice Chair; Salomon and Torres.

**Staff:** Tim Ford

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

**Background:** Impaired Driving. A person commits the crime of driving while under the influence (DUI) of intoxicating liquor, cannabis, or any drug if the person drives a motor vehicle:

- with a breath or blood alcohol concentration of 0.08 percent or higher;
- with a THC concentration of five or higher in their blood; or
- under the influence or a combined influence of intoxicating liquor, marijuana, and any drug.

The same factors apply for the crime of being in physical control (PC) of a motor vehicle while under the influence of intoxicating liquor, marijuana, or any drug if the person has actual physical control of a vehicle.

A DUI or PC criminal offense is punishable as a gross misdemeanor if the person has fewer than three prior DUI or PC convictions within seven years. It becomes a felony offense if a person has three or more prior convictions within ten years.

**Summary of Bill (First Substitute):** Impaired Driving. The breath or blood alcohol concentration limit of 0.08 percent or higher is reduced to 0.05 or higher for a person guilty of:

- driving while under the influence of intoxicating liquor, cannabis, or any drug; or
- being in actual physical control of a motor vehicle while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or any drug.

**EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY LAW & JUSTICE COMMITTEE (First Substitute):**

- Adds sections 6 and 7 to amend additional laws related to testing and license suspension for driving under the influence by lowering the BAC from .08 to .05 consistent with the bill.
- Provides a delayed effective date of December 31st, 2023.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect on December 31, 2023.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill:** *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: Our roads are not as safe as they could or should be. The people of our state should be and feel safe. Drunk driving is impacting the safety of our communities, and something must be done about it. Drunk driving collisions are avoidable. Impairment starts with the first drink. Drunk driving is the

offense, and this bill must be the defense. Drivers experience cognitive behavior and physical impairment with blood alcohol content level of 0.05, and that worsens as content level increases. Lower blood alcohol content threshold means less crashes and crimes, no increase in arrest, bars will still make money. This will not affect the tourist industry. Washington is fifth in the nation for increased percentage of traffic fatalities. Washington had over 700 traffic fatalities in 2022. Half of them involved impaired drivers, and one-third involved alcohol. Lowering blood alcohol content limit to 0.05 will save lives. Washington should join Utah, who has already established this limit, and saw traffic fatalities and alcohol impaired driving decrease. People will self-regulate. This is a proven countermeasure. It acts as a broad deterrent. Washington wants zero deaths and injuries on roads. This is a necessary step.

CON: There is no discernable way to recognize signs of intoxication at 0.05 and national training standards teach how to identify physical traits and behaviors of intoxication. The 40% BAC threshold reduction will put thousands of businesses and tens of thousands of employees at new risk when there are no tools to assist them. A change to 0.05 BAC would mean Washington wineries would not be able to compete in the global marketplace. This bill will hurt small business owners. It would be better to divert resources to target repeat offenders and high BAC drivers.

OTHER: Evidence indicates that this bill would likely lead to some drivers becoming aware of the 0.05 per se blood alcohol content limit, which would likely lead to some people modifying alcohol, impaired driving behaviors, and some reduction in alcohol impaired driving crashes. Research indicates the persons decision to comply with this limit depends on their underlying knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, and perceived likelihood of enforcement. It is impossible to predict how many may modify alcohol impaired driving as a result. Most US research has evaluated the impact of lowering the BAC from 0.1 to 0.08 and further lowering the BAC may not have the same level of impact. Evidence from Utah may not be generalizable to Washington due to differences in drinking culture, alcohol, environment, and alcohol impaired driving. The extent of the impact depends on drivers modifying behavior, and it is not possible to quantify the number of drivers that will comply with the law. It is unknown how the bill would impact decisions of arrest, prosecution, and adjudication.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator John Lovick, Prime Sponsor; Amy Freedheim; Dennis Maughan, Mothers Against Drunk Driving; Jane Terry, National Safety Council; Stephanie Shaw, Safety Advocate on behalf of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB); Linda Thompson, Washington Association for Substance Misuse and Violence Prevention; Shelly Baldwin, Washington Traffic Safety Commission; James McMahan, WA Assoc Sheriffs & Police Chiefs; Tony Gomez; Sheri Call, Washington Trucking Associations.

CON: Julia Gorton, Washington Hospitality Association; Josh McDonald, Washington Wine Institute.

OTHER: Lindsay Herendeen, State Board of Health.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.