

Rhode Island Statutes

Title 31. Motor and Other vehicles

Chapter 31-27. Motor Vehicle Offenses

Current through 2011 Legislative Session

§ 31-27-2. Driving under influence of liquor or drugs

(a) Whoever drives or otherwise operates any vehicle in the state while under the influence of any intoxicating liquor, drugs, toluene, or any controlled substance as defined in chapter 28 of title 21, or any combination of these, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor except as provided in subdivision (d)(3) and shall be punished as provided in subsection (d) of this section.

(b) Any person charged under subsection (a) of this section whose blood alcohol concentration is eight one-hundredths of one percent (.08%) or more by weight as shown by a chemical analysis of a blood, breath, or urine sample shall be guilty of violating subsection (a) of this section. This provision shall not preclude a conviction based on other admissible evidence. Proof of guilt under this section may also be based on evidence that the person charged was under the influence of intoxicating liquor, drugs, toluene, or any controlled substance defined in chapter 28 of title 21, or any combination of these, to a degree which rendered the person incapable of safely operating a vehicle. The fact that any person charged with violating this section is or has been legally entitled to use alcohol or a drug shall not constitute a defense against any charge of violating this section.

(2) Whoever drives or otherwise operates any vehicle in the state with a blood presence of any scheduled controlled substance as defined within chapter 28 of title 21, as shown by analysis of a blood or urine sample, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and shall be punished as provided in subsection (d) of this section.

(c) In any criminal prosecution for a violation of subsection (a) of this section, evidence as to the amount of intoxicating liquor, toluene, or any controlled substance as defined in chapter 28 of title 21, or any combination of these, in the defendant's blood at the time alleged as shown by a chemical analysis of the defendant's breath, blood, or urine or other bodily substance shall be admissible and competent, provided that evidence is presented that the following conditions have been complied with:

(1) The defendant has consented to the taking of the test upon which the analysis is made. Evidence that the defendant had refused to submit to the test shall not be

admissible unless the defendant elects to testify.

(2) A true copy of the report of the test result was mailed within seventy-two (72) hours of the taking of the test to the person submitting to a breath test.

(3) Any person submitting to a chemical test of blood, urine, or other body fluids shall have a true copy of the report of the test result mailed to him or her within thirty (30) days following the taking of the test.

(4) The test was performed according to methods and with equipment approved by the director of the department of health of the state of Rhode Island and by an authorized individual.

(5) Equipment used for the conduct of the tests by means of breath analysis had been tested for accuracy within thirty (30) days preceding the test by personnel qualified as hereinbefore provided, and breathalyzer operators shall be qualified and certified by the department of health within three hundred sixty-five (365) days of the test.

(6) The person arrested and charged with operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of intoxicating liquor, toluene, or any controlled substance as defined in chapter 28 of title 21, or, any combination of these in violation of subsection (a) of this section was afforded the opportunity to have an additional chemical test. The officer arresting or so charging the person shall have informed the person of this right and afforded him or her a reasonable opportunity to exercise this right, and a notation to this effect is made in the official records of the case in the police department. Refusal to permit an additional chemical test shall render incompetent and inadmissible in evidence the original report.

(d) Every person found to have violated subdivision (b)(1) of this section shall be sentenced as follows: for a first violation whose blood alcohol concentration is eight one-hundredths of one percent (.08%) but less than one-tenth of one percent (.1%) by weight or who has a blood presence of any scheduled controlled substance as defined in subdivision (b)(2) shall be subject to a fine of not less than one hundred dollars (\$100) nor more than three hundred dollars (\$300), shall be required to perform ten (10) to sixty (60) hours of public community restitution, and/or shall be imprisoned for up to one year. The sentence may be served in any unit of the adult correctional institutions in the discretion of the sentencing judge and/or shall be required to attend a special course on driving while intoxicated or under the influence of a controlled substance; provided, however, that the court may permit a servicemember or veteran to complete any court-approved counseling program administered or approved by the Veterans' Administration, and his or her driver's license shall be suspended for thirty (30) days up to one hundred eighty

(180) days.

(ii) Every person convicted of a first violation whose blood alcohol concentration is one-tenth of one percent (.1%) by weight or above but less than fifteen hundredths of one percent (.15%) or whose blood alcohol concentration is unknown shall be subject to a fine of not less than one hundred (\$100) dollars nor more than four hundred dollars (\$400) and shall be required to perform ten (10) to sixty (60) hours of public community restitution and/or shall be imprisoned for up to one year. The sentence may be served in any unit of the adult correctional institutions in the discretion of the sentencing judge. The person's driving license shall be suspended for a period of three (3) months to twelve (12) months. The sentencing judge shall require attendance at a special course on driving while intoxicated or under the influence of a controlled substance and/or alcoholic or drug treatment for the individual; provided, however, that the court may permit a servicemember or veteran to complete any court-approved counseling program administered or approved by the Veterans' Administration.

(iii) Every person convicted of a first offense whose blood alcohol concentration is fifteen hundredths of one percent (.15%) or above, or who is under the influence of a drug, toluene, or any controlled substance as defined in subdivision (b)(1) shall be subject to a fine of five hundred dollars (\$500) and shall be required to perform twenty (20) to sixty (60) hours of public community restitution and/or shall be imprisoned for up to one year. The sentence may be served in any unit of the adult correctional institutions in the discretion of the sentencing judge. The person's driving license shall be suspended for a period of three (3) months to eighteen (18) months. The sentencing judge shall require attendance at a special course on driving while intoxicated or under the influence of a controlled substance and/or alcohol or drug treatment for the individual; provided, however, that the court may permit a servicemember or veteran to complete any court-approved counseling program administered or approved by the Veterans' Administration.

(2) Every person convicted of a second violation within a five (5) year period with a blood alcohol concentration of eight one-hundredths of one percent (.08%) or above but less than fifteen hundredths of one percent (.15%) or whose blood alcohol concentration is unknown or who has a blood presence of any controlled substance as defined in subdivision (b)(2), and every person convicted of a second violation within a five (5) year period regardless of whether the prior violation and subsequent conviction was a violation and subsequent conviction under this statute or under the driving under the influence of liquor or drugs statute of any other state, shall be subject to a mandatory fine of four hundred dollars (\$400). The person's driving license shall be suspended for a period of one year to two (2) years, and the

individual shall be sentenced to not less than ten (10) days nor more than one year in jail. The sentence may be served in any unit of the adult correctional institutions in the discretion of the sentencing judge; however, not less than forty-eight (48) hours of imprisonment shall be served consecutively. The sentencing judge shall require alcohol or drug treatment for the individual; provided, however, that the court may permit a servicemember or veteran to complete any court-approved counseling program administered or approved by the Veterans' Administration and may prohibit that person from operating a motor vehicle that is not equipped with an ignition interlock system for a period of one year to two (2) years following the completion of the sentence as provided in § 31-27-2.8.

(ii) Every person convicted of a second violation within a five (5) year period whose blood alcohol concentration is fifteen hundredths of one percent (.15%) or above by weight as shown by a chemical analysis of a blood, breath, or urine sample or who is under the influence of a drug, toluene, or any controlled substance as defined in subdivision (b)(1) shall be subject to mandatory imprisonment of not less than six (6) months nor more than one year, a mandatory fine of not less than one thousand dollars (\$1,000) and a mandatory license suspension for a period of two (2) years from the date of completion of the sentence imposed under this subsection. The sentencing judge shall require alcohol or drug treatment for the individual; provided, however, that the court may permit a servicemember or veteran to complete any court approved counseling program administered or approved by the Veterans' Administration.

(3) Every person convicted of a third or subsequent violation within a five (5) year period with a blood alcohol concentration of eight one-hundredths of one percent (.08%) or above but less than fifteen hundredths of one percent (.15%) or whose blood alcohol concentration is unknown or who has a blood presence of any scheduled controlled substance as defined in subdivision (b)(2) regardless of whether any prior violation and subsequent conviction was a violation and subsequent conviction under this statute or under the driving under the influence of liquor or drugs statute of any other state, shall be guilty of a felony and be subject to a mandatory fine of four hundred (\$400) dollars. The person's driving license shall be suspended for a period of two (2) years to three (3) years, and the individual shall be sentenced to not less than one year and not more than three (3) years in jail. The sentence may be served in any unit of the adult correctional institutions in the discretion of the sentencing judge; however, not less than forty-eight (48) hours of imprisonment shall be served consecutively. The sentencing judge shall require alcohol or drug treatment for the individual; provided, however, that the court may permit a servicemember or veteran to complete any court-approved counseling program administered or approved by the Veterans'

Administration, and may prohibit that person from operating a motor vehicle that is not equipped with an ignition interlock system for a period of two (2) years following the completion of the sentence as provided in § 31-27-2.8.

(ii) Every person convicted of a third or subsequent violation within a five (5) year period whose blood alcohol concentration is fifteen hundredths of one percent (.15%) above by weight as shown by a chemical analysis of a blood, breath, or urine sample or who is under the influence of a drug, toluene or any controlled substance as defined in subdivision (b)(1) shall be subject to mandatory imprisonment of not less than three (3) years nor more than five (5) years, a mandatory fine of not less than one thousand dollars (\$1,000) nor more than five thousand dollars (\$5,000) and a mandatory license suspension for a period of three (3) years from the date of completion of the sentence imposed under this subsection.

(iii) In addition to the foregoing penalties, every person convicted of a third or subsequent violation within a five (5) year period regardless of whether any prior violation and subsequent conviction was a violation and subsequent conviction under this statute or under the driving under the influence of liquor or drugs statute of any other state shall be subject, in the discretion of the sentencing judge, to having the vehicle owned and operated by the violator seized and sold by the state of Rhode Island, with all funds obtained by the sale to be transferred to the general fund.

(4) Whoever drives or otherwise operates any vehicle in the state while under the influence of any intoxicating liquor, drugs, toluene, or any controlled substance as defined in chapter 28 of title 21, or any combination of these, when his or her license to operate is suspended, revoked or cancelled for operating under the influence of a narcotic drug or intoxicating liquor shall be guilty of a felony punishable by imprisonment for not more than three (3) years and by a fine or not more than three thousand dollars (\$3,000). The court shall require alcohol and/or drug treatment for the individual; provided, the penalties provided for in subdivision 31-27-2(d)(4) shall not apply to an individual who has surrendered his or her license, and served the court ordered period of suspension, but who, for any reason, has not had their license reinstated after the period of suspension, revocation, or suspension has expired; provided, further the individual shall be subject to the provisions of paragraphs 31-27-2(d)(2)(i) or (ii) or 31-27-22(d)(3)(i), (ii), or (iii) regarding subsequent offenses, and any other applicable provision of § 31-27-2.

(5) For purposes of determining the period of license suspension, a prior violation shall constitute any charge brought and sustained under the provisions of this section or § 31-27-2.1.

(ii) Any person over the age of eighteen (18) who is convicted under this section for operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, other drugs, or a combination of these, while a child under the age of thirteen (13) years was present as a passenger in the motor vehicle when the offense was committed may be sentenced to a term of imprisonment of not more than one year and further shall not be entitled to the benefit of suspension or deferment of this sentence. The sentence imposed under this section may be served in any unit of the adult correctional institutions in the discretion of the sentencing judge.

(6) Any person convicted of a violation under this section shall pay a highway assessment fine of five hundred dollars (\$500) which shall be deposited into the general fund. The assessment provided for by this subsection shall be collected from a violator before any other fines authorized by this section.

(ii) Any person convicted of a violation under this section shall be assessed a fee of eighty-six dollars (\$86).

(7) If the person convicted of violating this section is under the age of eighteen (18) years, for the first violation he or she shall be required to perform ten (10) to sixty (60) hours of public community restitution, and the juvenile's driving license shall be suspended for a period of six (6) months, and may be suspended for a period up to eighteen (18) months. The sentencing judge shall also require attendance at a special course on driving while intoxicated or under the influence of a controlled substance and alcohol or drug education and/or treatment for the juvenile. The juvenile may also be required to pay a highway assessment fine of no more than five hundred dollars (\$500), and the assessment imposed shall be deposited into the general fund.

(ii) If the person convicted of violating this section is under the age of eighteen (18) years, for a second or subsequent violation regardless of whether any prior violation and subsequent conviction was a violation and subsequent under this statute or under the driving under the influence of liquor or drugs statute of any other state, he or she shall be subject to a mandatory suspension of his or her driving license until such time as he or she is twenty-one (21) years of age and may, in the discretion of the sentencing judge, also be sentenced to the Rhode Island training school for a period of not more than one year and/or a fine of not more than five hundred dollars (\$500).

(8) Any person convicted of a violation under this section may undergo a clinical assessment at the community college of Rhode Island's center for workforce and community education. Should this clinical assessment determine problems of alcohol, drug abuse, or psychological problems associated with alcoholic or drug abuse, this person shall be referred to an appropriate facility, licensed or approved by the department of mental

health, retardation and hospitals for treatment placement, case management, and monitoring. In the case of a servicemember or veteran, the court may order that the person be evaluated through the Veterans' Administration. Should the clinical assessment determine problems of alcohol, drug abuse, or psychological problems associated with alcohol or drug abuse, the person may have their treatment, case management and monitoring administered or approved by the Veterans' Administration.

(e) Percent by weight of alcohol in the blood shall be based upon milligrams of alcohol per one hundred (100) cubic centimeters of blood.

(f) There is established an alcohol and drug safety unit within the division of motor vehicles to administer an alcohol safety action program. The program shall provide for placement and follow-up for persons who are required to pay the highway safety assessment. The alcohol and drug safety action program will be administered in conjunction with alcohol and drug programs licensed by the department of mental health retardation and hospitals.

(2) Persons convicted under the provisions of this chapter shall be required to attend a special course on driving while intoxicated or under the influence of a controlled substance, and/or participate in an alcohol or drug treatment program; provided, however, that the court may permit a servicemember or veteran to complete any court-approved counseling program administered or approved by the Veterans' Administration. The course shall take into consideration any language barrier which may exist as to any person ordered to attend, and shall provide for instruction reasonably calculated to communicate the purposes of the course in accordance with the requirements of the subsection. Any costs reasonably incurred in connection with the provision of this accommodation shall be borne by the person being retrained. A copy of any violation under this section shall be forwarded by the court to the alcohol and drug safety unit. In the event that persons convicted under the provisions of this chapter fail to attend and complete the above course or treatment program, as ordered by the judge, then the person may be brought before the court, and after a hearing as to why the order of the court was not followed, may be sentenced to jail for a period not exceeding one year.

(3) The alcohol and drug safety action program within the division of motor vehicles shall be funded by general revenue appropriations.

(g) The director of the health department of the state of Rhode Island is empowered to make and file with the secretary of state regulations which prescribe the techniques and methods of chemical analysis of the person's body fluids or breath, and the qualifications and certification of individuals authorized to administer this

testing and analysis.

(h) Jurisdiction for misdemeanor violations of this section shall be with the district court for persons eighteen (18) years of age or older and to the family court for persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The courts shall have full authority to impose any sentence authorized and to order the suspension of any license for violations of this section. All trials in the district court and family court of violations of the section shall be scheduled within thirty (30) days of the arraignment date. No continuance or postponement shall be granted except for good cause shown. Any continuances that are necessary shall be granted for the shortest practicable time. Trials in superior court are not required to be scheduled within thirty (30) days of the arraignment date.

(i) No fines, suspensions, assessments, alcohol or drug treatment programs, course on driving while intoxicated or under the influence of a controlled substance, public community restitution, or jail provided for under this section can be suspended.

(j) An order to attend a special course on driving while intoxicated that shall be administered in cooperation with a college or university accredited by the state, shall include a provision to pay a reasonable tuition for the course in an amount not less than twenty-five dollars (\$25.00), and a fee of one hundred seventy-five dollars (\$175), which fee shall be deposited into the general fund.

(k) For the purposes of this section, any test of a sample of blood, breath, or urine for the presence of alcohol, which relies in whole or in part upon the principle of infrared light absorption is considered a chemical test.

(l) If any provision of this section or the application of any provision shall for any reason be judged invalid, such a judgment shall not affect, impair, or invalidate the remainder of the section, but shall be confined in this effect to the provision or application directly involved in the controversy giving rise to the judgment.

(m) For the purposes of this section, "servicemember" means a person who is presently serving in the armed forces of the United States including the Coast Guard, a reserve component thereof, or the National Guard. "Veteran" means a person who has served in the armed forces, including the Coast Guard of the United States, a reserve component thereof, or the National Guard, and has been discharged under other than dishonorable conditions.

Cite as R.I. Gen. Laws § 31-27-2

History. P.L. 1950, ch. 2595, art. 24, § 2; P.L. 1950 s.s., ch. 2639, § 3; G.L. 1956, § 31-27-2; P.L. 1959, ch. 101, § 1; P.L. 1973, ch. 213, § 1; P.L. 1974, ch. 120, § 2; P.L. 1980, ch. 321, § 1; P.L. 1982, ch. 176, § 1; P.L. 1983, ch. 227, § 1; P.L. 1985, ch. 138, § 1; P.L. 1985, ch. 139, § 1;

P.L. 1985, ch. 150, § 39; P.L. 1986, ch. 275, § 1; P.L. 1986, ch. 433, § 1; P.L. 1986, ch. 494, § 2; P.L. 1986, ch. 508, § 1; P.L. 1989, ch. 149, § 1; P.L. 1990, ch. 329, § 1; P.L. 1990, ch. 496, § 1; P.L. 1991, ch. 65, § 1; P.L. 1992, ch. 133, art. 37, § 6; P.L. 1992, ch. 133, art. 94, § 1; P.L. 1992, ch. 405, § 1; P.L. 1992, ch. 418, § 5; P.L. 1993, ch. 138, art. 26, § 3; P.L. 1994, ch. 70, art. 35, § 7; P.L. 1995, ch. 370, art. 14, § 7; P.L. 1996, ch. 224, § 1; P.L. 1996, ch. 263, § 1; P.L. 1998, ch. 91, art. 1, § 3; P.L. 1999, ch. 360, § 1; P.L. 2000, ch. 109, § 40; P.L. 2000, ch. 168, § 1; P.L. 2000, ch. 264, § 1; P.L. 2003, ch. 87, § 1; P.L. 2003, ch. 88, § 1; P.L. 2006, ch. 350, § 1; P.L. 2006, ch. 474, § 1; P.L. 2009, ch. 68, art. 5, § 3; P.L. 2010, ch. 23, art. 18, § 2; P.L. 2010, ch. 102, § 1; P.L. 2010, ch. 318, § 1; P.L. 2011, ch. 58, § 2; P.L. 2011, ch. 96, § 2.