

Greta Geiser
12th Grade
Word count: 927

Who is paying the price?

Imagine you are 17 years old. It is a beautiful Sunday evening in Florida; 87° F and the perfect time for a motorcycle ride. You have been riding bikes since you were a kid, and you love the feeling of smoothly rolling down the road to the gentle hum of your motorcycle's motor. You go around a corner and are suddenly hit before you can think to stop. Just like that, your life is over. Your life was abruptly stolen from you, and it had only just begun. Later in the night your parents get a call that brings them to their knees. They have just been told that you have been hit by a drunk driver and will not be coming home. The news spreads to the rest of your family, your friends, and your entire community. Everyone is at a loss. The grief settles into heartbreak like rubble after a hurricane, the weight of this tragedy sinking in.

This is a true story. This is the story of Mikael Steele, a 17 year old student who was hit at an intersection by a man driving under the influence of alcohol on October 25th of 2020. While this accident was shocking to the community, accidents like it are devastatingly common. People choose to drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs on a daily basis, letting their convenience be prioritized over others safety. The argument that DUI charges should not be a felony sympathizes with the driver, while the argument in favor of DUI charges being a felony sympathizes with the victims of DUI accidents.

The problem with both arguments is that someone must pay for the actions of the DUI offender in either case. To say that DUI charges should not be a felony gives grace to the DUI offender. They will be mildly inconvenienced from their daily life by either limited jail time, volunteer work, or paying minor fines. These punishments are an annoyance, but they do not highly discourage to repeat their actions of driving under the influence.

According to recent studies, an average of 29 people die every day due to DUI accidents. In 2018 alone, there were 10,511 reported deaths caused from driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. These statistics make it painfully clear that DUI should be a felony in Florida, as well as other states.

In Florida, DUI charges are only considered a felony after the third offense with prior charges within the past 10 years. The current possible penalties a driver faces if convicted of a first or second DUI are fairly mild and do not strongly discourage driving under the influence. Driving while drunk is entirely avoidable; every person who drinks consistently should take the responsibility of finding transportation to their place of living that does not involve them getting behind a wheel. When a punishment for an action is strong enough, only a select few will choose to continue to walk in that action.

While the numbers of DUI accidents have decreased over the past few years, there are still roughly 10,000 deaths each year due to DUI accidents, evidence that points to the need for stronger DUI laws. Having lenient laws places lives in danger because the punishment does not outweigh the inconvenience of obeying the law. While the laws do not need to change drastically, it can be argued that current laws need to be more severe in order for them to actively hinder more accidents from happening

In 2020, there are many options for transportation available to drunk drivers, from simply texting a friend to calling an Uber; there is never a reasonable excuse for driving while under the influence. DUI laws are in place solely to prevent people from harming themselves and others, following them is a matter of life and death in many cases. If the DUI laws are not actively making a change in the amount of DUI accidents, it shows that they are in need of change. DUI

charges should consider being classified as felonies within the state of Florida in order to preserve the safety and wellbeing of its citizens.

When under the influence, a person has a choice whether or not to step into a vehicle and sit behind the wheel. On the contrary, a person does not have a choice whenever they are hit by a DUI offender. When DUI laws are made or modified, the well-being of every person should be on the forefronts of the lawmakers' minds. They need to ask who is paying the price for the DUI charge? The DUI offender, or the DUI victims?

Mikael Steele did not have a choice when he was hit by a car, but the driver of the other vehicle did. Living with the grief of being responsible for a 17-year-old's life is a burden that no person should have to carry, but the man who hit Mikael was responsible for his death and could have prevented it had he been of sober mind. Careless actions will always have careless accidents, and gambling with your own life as well as others should have severe punishments.

To say that DUI charges should be a felony gives justice to all the lives lost every year due to DUI accidents. It gives hope for a change in the statistics of DUI offenses, and it provides a heavy enough consequence to prevent drunk or impaired people from dismissing assistance home. DUI charges must change in order for lives like Mikael's and so many others' to be saved.

Works Cited:

<https://www.wfla.com/news/local-news/manatee-county/i-just-want-my-baby-back-says-mother-of-17-year-old-crash-victim-after-suspected-drunk-driver-released-on-bond/>

<https://dui.drivinglaws.org/florida.php>

<https://www.wfla.com/news/local-news/fhp-20-year-old-tampa-woman-dies-after-her-impaired-driver-crashes-into-truck/>