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The lawyer who tackled the country's assisted suicide laws will take on the Alberta government's toughened drunk driving penalties.

Civil Liberties Association lawyer Joseph Arvay has been retained by Alberta firm Roadlawyers, which specializes in drunk driving cases, one of several that are decrying the Alberta government's decision to indefinitely suspend licences of drivers who blow over the Criminal Code limit of .08 blood-alcohol content.

Drivers police deem are over the .08 limit will immediately have their licences suspended without even seeing a judge, a penalty that will remain in place until the charge is resolved in court.

"I think it's clearly contrary to the Constitution and clearly contrary to the Charter (of Rights and Freedoms)," said Roadlawyer attorney Tim Foster.

"We intend to challenge the legislation as soon as we get retained on a file dealing with one of these — we're going to bring a Constitutional challenge to try to strike the law down."

Foster said they've already retained Arvay to come and argue what he's calling a "full-fledged Constitutional challenge" because of his experience with Constitutional cases.

Arvey represented Gloria Taylor, a 64-year-old woman fighting for the right to have a doctor-assisted suicide in a landmark B.C. Supreme Court ruling that is pushing the federal government to draft new legislation around carefully monitored, doctor-assisted suicide.

"We're all ready to go, we're just waiting for the first people to get charged and then we'll rock and roll," he said.

In what's being called a first for Canada, Transportation Minister Ric McIver came out Monday saying drivers who blow over .08 will be hit hard with an indefinite suspension starting July 1, one of several get-tough measures rolled out in the Traffic Safety Amendment Act passed last year.

McIver said drivers simply weren't refraining enough from tipping their glasses before hitting the roads and harsher penalties were needed to ensure "all of us feel more secure when we go out on Alberta roadways."

Many lawyers, however, say the new penalties are nothing more than a tactic that will strong-arm drivers into issuing guilty pleas rather than challenge their cases in court.

"There's some good and bad about that from a public policy perspective," said Alan Pearse, who specializes in DUI cases in Calgary.

"The good news is you will almost certainly force guilty people to plead guilty. The bad news is you're likely going to force some innocent people to plead guilty as well."

Lawyer Bob Sawers called it the government's way to "extort" guilty pleas from Albertans who can't afford to lose their licences for several months and said he would demanding trial dates be set within two months.

Courts currently have a six- to nine-month waiting list to hear cases.

"I have a trial in Toronto that's gone on for 42 months — a substantial portion of that is due to Crown delay," Sawers said.

"It's absurd to think a person can lose their licence for that long."

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