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We expect our provincial politicians to take the lead on important issues.

But there's a difference between taking bold strides and stepping over the line.

The province has done just that by ignoring due process in its new impaired driving law.

We're not talking about the .05 law set to take effect in September, but the penalties imposed for those charged with driving over .08 which will kick in on Canada Day.

Here's where it gets a little complicated.

Criminal Code impaired driving laws and penalties, which are set by the feds, remain the same.

What the province is changing are the "administrative penalties" imposed on drivers charged and convicted of driving over .08.

There are some solid measures in the province's new law, such as forcing those convicted of impaired driving to install an interlock ignition breathalyzer-like device before they can get behind the wheel again.

We're 100% behind tougher penalties for those convicted of drunk driving.

The trouble with Alberta's new law is it treats those charged as though they've already been found guilty.

Alberta is the first province to suspend the licences of drivers who blow over .08 immediately and indefinitely — until their charge is resolved.

Lawyers who plan to mount constitutional challenges against the law say that because of a backlog in court cases, many drivers — including some who are innocent — will simply plead guilty to avoid lengthy licence suspensions.

Those eventually convicted in a court of law will also face criminal penalties proscribed by federal law.

For many Albertans, losing their licence can lead to job loss, even losing a home for those who can't pay their mortgage.

Fair enough for those convicted, we say.

But in this country, it is innocent until proven guilty — not the other way around.

Police do make mistakes and the machines that measure blood alcohol content are not infallible.

Offering those who blow over .08 a chance to take a test on a second breathalyzer doesn't go far enough to protect those who are potentially innocent.

The province is right to get tough on drunk driving, but it can't walk all over the right of every Canadian to a fair hearing in the process.