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## **Holiday Season Road Deaths Prompt Safety Coalition to Call on States and Congress to Enact Stronger Traffic Safety Laws**

**Parents, teens, medical personnel, firefighters, insurance executives, and safety advocates join Rep. Castle to urge enactment of national STANDUP Act to accelerate state passage of Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) laws for novice teen drivers.**

NEWARK, DE (Monday, November 30, 2009) – In response to the high-risk road travel holiday season and the record number of families traveling by car, a coalition of national and state medical, safety and business representatives gathered today at Christiana Hospital to encourage safe driving and urge lawmakers to pass strong traffic safety laws.

Each year nearly 40,000 people die and two million more are injured in highway crashes in the U.S. The December holiday season typically sees a higher incidence of traffic crashes, deaths and injuries. Most at risk are novice teen drivers for whom highway crashes are the leading cause of death and disabling injury nationwide. Each year more than 6400 die in crashes involving a teen driver.

Rep. Michael Castle (R-DE) spoke about legislation he is co-sponsoring, the Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection (STANDUP) Act (H.R. 1895), which sets minimum standards for state graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws. Research shows that comprehensive GDL laws, dramatically reduce deaths and injuries among young beginning drivers and those who share the road with them.

GDL laws for novice teen drivers vary widely state to state, which has resulted in an uneven patchwork of strong and weak state GDL laws with loopholes through which thousands of teens are killed or injured each year. .

Jacqueline Gillan, Vice-President of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety ([www.saferoads.org](http://www.saferoads.org)) noted, “Delaware has a strong GDL law to protect teens. While several states have strong teen driving laws, many states have serious gaps that put our teens at far greater risk on our roads. It doesn’t make sense that teens driving between states do not follow the same rules of the road, especially when these rules could save their lives.”

The STANDUP Act calls for all states to have a three-stage licensing process (learner’s, intermediate and unrestricted); restrictions on night time driving and the maximum number of teen passengers; bans on cell phone use and text messaging except for emergencies; and establishes age 16 for issuance of a learner’s permit with full licensure at age 18.

For three years following congressional enactment of the STANDUP Act, states that comply with the defined minimum requirements would receive incentive grants for their highway safety programs. After three years, those states that do not comply would forfeit a portion of their federal highway construction program funds until the necessary teen driving safety statutes are adopted by the state.

The federal practice of withholding funds – known as “sanctions” – has worked effectively in the past to compel all 50 states and the District of Columbia to enact other lifesaving traffic safety measures, such as the National Uniform 21 Minimum Drinking Age that President Reagan signed into law in 1984. President Clinton used the same approach in 1995 when he signed the zero tolerance drinking and driving law for motorists under age 21, and in 2000 when he signed the nationwide .08 percent Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) impaired driving law. With bi-partisan support these federal laws resulted in every state adopting the law and not a single state losing any federal-aid funds. More importantly, these laws are credited with saving more than 25,000 lives. Using this approach to improve state teen driving laws will lead to significant reductions in teen driver crashes and related deaths and disabling injuries.

Rep. Castle, the lead Republican sponsor of the STANDUP Act, said, “This effort to bring all states into compliance with minimum federal standards for improved teen driving practices is vitally important to every American family and community across the country. There is an urgent need to ensure that every teen in every state is protected by an effective GDL law. As a former Governor, I can attest to the critical importance of moving quickly to put proven-effective laws in place to prevent tragedies on our roadways.”

Rep. Castle was joined by Susan Vavala, a guidance counsel at St. Mark’s High School in Wilmington, who lost her 15-year old daughter, Kim, in a crash involving a teen driver. Ms. Vavala was accompanied by several students who are active in the St. Mark’s chapter of Students Against Destructive Decisions / Youth Eliminating Loss of Life (SADD/YELL).

“Kim and many others have died because the previous Delaware licensing system failed teens by not addressing an essential aspect of driving -- experience behind the wheel. Since its implementation in June 1999, Delaware’s GDL program is one of the strongest in the country, reducing crashes involving 16-year-old drivers by almost 60%,” said Ms. Vavala. “It is time to help all of our children to make better choices based on good judgment that comes only with experience. With the implementation of the STANDUP Act, roads in every state will be safer for all of us and other families will not have to experience a tragic loss like mine.”

Local Allstate Insurance agent Charlene Webb, speaking on behalf of the many local insurance professionals in attendance, said “This is an issue that is bigger than any one person or company or coalition. This is a threat to our collective health that penetrates every corner of America. We have a problem, we know of an effective solution and now it’s time for Congress to act.”

Allstate has joined with other insurance companies, including State Farm Insurance Companies, Farmers Insurance / 21<sup>st</sup> Century Insurance and Financial Services, Liberty Mutual, USAA, Nationwide Insurance, Unitrin, GEICO and American Family Insurance in supporting the Saferoads4teens Coalition with over 110 national, state and local organizations supporting adoption of the STANDUP Act. The Saferoads4teens coalition can be reached at [www.saferoads4teens.org](http://www.saferoads4teens.org)

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