



**ADVOCATES**  
for Highway & Auto Safety

**S T A T E M E N T**  
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**Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates)**

**Release by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) of  
2008 Fatal Analysis Reporting System (FARS) Data  
July 2, 2009**

***ADVOCATES' PRIORITY SAFETY LEGISLATION NEEDED MORE THAN EVER***

The release of 2008 fatality data today by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) indicates a significant drop in motor vehicle crash deaths over the same time period in 2007 (9.7%). The overall number of traffic fatalities reported in 2008 was 37,261, compared to 41,259 in 2007. This is no great surprise, given the economic recession the entire nation was, and is experiencing. In previous recessions – the early 1980s and early 1990s – a similar dramatic drop in car crash fatalities was evident, due to greatly reduced exposure and many fewer discretionary trips taken by motorists.

Although it is always heartening to know fewer people died and suffered injuries in motor vehicle crashes, we cannot rely on poor economic conditions to ensure major progress in traffic safety, especially because historical trends tell us the numbers will reverse as the economy improves. There are still nearly 40,000 people dying on the nation's roads, and hundreds of thousands more sustain life-changing and debilitating injuries on an annual basis.

Advocates is dedicated to achieving permanent, substantial reductions in the number of annual deaths and injuries by adopting key policy improvements at the federal and state levels, and strongly urges Congress to adopt the following initiatives in the ongoing transportation reauthorization, or as stand-alone bills:

- **H.R.1895, Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection (STANDUP) Act**, sponsored by Reps. Tim Bishop (D-NY), Michael Castle (R-DE) and Chris Van Hollen, Jr. (D-MD). The 2007 FARS data shows that at least 7,500 people died in teen-related crashes, the majority of them teens. These tragedies often happen one or two at a time, so the outrage about the public epidemic these numbers represent is muted. Every death, especially of a child, is a terrible waste, particularly when we know that there are proven solutions in comprehensive graduated driver licensing programs that can prevent many of these tragedies. H.R. 1895 would go a long way toward reducing these staggering figures that represent incalculable harm in the lives of very real people.

- **Primary Enforcement Seat Belt Laws in Every State.** The Surface Transportation Assistance Act (STAA) of 2009, currently proceeding through the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, wisely includes a provision that would encourage every state to pass a primary enforcement seat belt use law, allowing police enforcement officials to stop motorists for not using a seat belt without first having to ticket them for another violation. These laws have proven effective in raising seat belt use rates and saving lives. States that do not enact such a law in three years would be sanctioned a portion of their federal-aid highway funds until they enact the belt law upgrade. 30 states and DC currently have primary enforcement authority in their laws; this provision would result in all 50 states enforcing optimal safety belt laws and higher use rates across the nation. Advocates worked for adoption of this key safety measure in the STAA of 2009 and strongly urges the full committee to keep it in the bill.
- **Electronic On-Board Recorders in All Commercial Vehicles in Interstate Commerce.** The STAA of 2009 also requires that interstate trucks (at or above 10,000 pounds) and buses (that carry eight or more passengers for compensation) be equipped with electronic on-board recorders that will reduce driver fatigue by improving enforcement of the current lax hours-of-service reporting system. This is a crucial reform that Advocates and other safety groups have petitioned the Department of Transportation to implement for many years.
- **Stronger State Ignition Interlock Impaired Driving Laws.** The STAA 2009 also provides that states adopt impaired driving laws that require the use of ignition interlock devices on vehicles of drivers convicted of impaired driving, upon first offense and thereafter. This provision will accelerate the pace of adoption of important laws that will deter drunk and drugged driving in every state, reducing the toll of nearly 12,000 people who die annually in alcohol-involved auto crashes.

Congress has the responsibility to provide leadership and to be pro-active in saving lives and avoiding costly injuries. Congress has a unique opportunity to act on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of Americans who are killed and seriously injured unnecessarily in preventable motor vehicle crashes each year. This is the time to put in place proven, inexpensive, and long-term solutions that will save lives and taxpayer dollars.

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