

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Passage Now of Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection (STANDUP) Act Would Stem Reckless Annual Tide of Thousands of Teen Car Crash Deaths

Nearly 4000 Expected to Die in 2011; 81,000 People Lost in Past 10 Years -

Enough To Fill A Major Sports Stadium

Recent Survey of Parents Shows Strong Support for Core STANDUP Provisions

U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C. – Parents of children killed in teen-related crashes joined others affected by such all-too-common incidents, safety advocates and a leading research expert today in the U.S. Capitol to put a face on a stubborn public health epidemic and urge quick passage of the STANDUP Act (HR 1895/ S.3269). STANDUP would set minimum standards for state graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws for beginning teen drivers, many of which are not currently optimal. Major issues addressed in STANDUP include a minimum age of 16 for learner’s permits and 18 for a full unrestricted license; a ban on non-emergency cell phone use; and nighttime driving and passenger restrictions.

"Far too many young people's lives are cut short in these terrible crashes each year," said Congressman Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), a lead House co-sponsor of the legislation. "And as the parent of a teen driver myself, I know full well the awful toll these crashes have taken on families around the country. By passing the STANDUP Act, we have the ability to make our roads safer - and spare families the pain and anguish of losing a child."

Jackie Gillan, vice president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, said "This is truly a bipartisan issue, leaving partisan politics behind. Democrat or Republican, STANDUP sponsors understand that saving teen lives is what this legislation is about."

Sherry Chapman co-founded Mourning Parents Act (!MPACT) in Connecticut after her son, Ryan Ramirez, was killed as a passenger in a teen-driver crash in 2002. She asked, "What are we waiting for? It doesn't make sense at all to have different teen driving laws in every state. Hundreds of thousands of families and friends have suffered needlessly, and the world is worse off for these losses."

As a 14-year-old passenger in a vehicle driven by a 16-year-old, Tyler Presnell of Vancouver, Washington, sustained extensive life-altering injuries when the car hit a telephone pole at over 70 miles per hour in 1999. "Once I woke up, I had to relearn everything," he recounted. "During the next year, my mom changed my diapers, and I was fed through a tube in my stomach. I was 15 years old and had no idea what fitting in – or even being a teenager – was like.... 10 years later I'm still undergoing major surgeries and I have obstacles to overcome every day. I can't help but wonder how different things might have been if strong, effective GDL laws had been in place when I was a teenager."

Nearly eight years ago, Jim Portell's 15-year-old daughter, Jamie, died in Florida when the car full of teens in which she rode, driven by a 16-year-old, rolled after the driver over-compensated and ejected all five occupants, all who were unbelted. Portell believes that his daughter would be alive today if STANDUP had been enacted. "I wanted to use my loss and Jamie's life to help other kids, parents,

brothers and sisters and families,” he said. “No one should have to suffer such pain, it almost feels inhuman.....Jamie was not just my daughter, she was my best friend.”

Bill Walter’s 17-year-old son, Matt, died unexpectedly six weeks after a Baltimore, Maryland, crash in 1999, from injuries received in the crash. “My son Matt was killed in a senseless crash with a teen driver, the tragic consequences of some poor decisions made by a couple of teenagers who should not have been out on the road that evening,” he said. “I truly hope that something good can come from Matt’s tragedy....I urge our lawmakers to save lives of teens like Matt by passing the STANDUP Act now.”

Susan Vavala of Wilmington, Delaware, also spoke in favor of STANDUP, saying, “It’s too late for Kim, but it is not too late for the rest of us.” Vavala’s daughter, Kim, was just shy of her 16th birthday when in 1995 she died instantly in a car driven by a 16-year-old who had just received his license 10 days before he crashed. “Everyone who shares the road with teen drivers is a potential victim of immaturity and inexperience,” she continued. “No drugs, alcohol or excessive speed were involved. Rather, all five of these young people were the victims of inexperience; of a failure to recognize that new teen drivers lack the skills that come with time spent behind the wheel; and of a false sense of security that comes when a young teen gets a driver’s license.”

Anne T. McCartt, PhD, Senior Vice President, Research, of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), shared results of a recent national survey indicating record levels of support among parents for the major provisions of STANDUP. “Parents favor graduated licensing laws as strict as or stricter than exist in any state,” she said. “Many would accept licensing rules that go beyond the proposed STANDUP Act’s provisions.”

The IIHS study indicated parents generally prefer higher licensing ages than are the norm in the United States. Two-thirds of parents surveyed said they favor 16 for a learner’s permit and 16 ½ for an intermediate license, or higher for both licensing stages. Ninety-two percent (92%) think teens should stay in the learner’s permit period for at least 6 months (a STANDUP provision), and more than half think that length of time should be at least a year. Also more than half of parents surveyed thought 18 or older should be the threshold for a full license (STANDUP sets full license age at 18).

Kaylen Larson, a 17-year-old high school student from East Grand Forks, Minnesota, and State Vice President of MN Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America, traveled to the nation’s capital to express support for STANDUP. “As a teen from a rural area, I know how dangerous rural driving can be,” she said. “Teens from rural states suffer higher rates of fatal crashes than our peers in urban areas. I want all teenagers to realize that they hold a lot in their hands when they get behind the wheel of a car. GDL laws give us a structure for making good driving decisions and they help us fight peer pressure, too. Why should teens be safer in one state than teens in another?”

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