



**ADVOCATES
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NEWS RELEASE

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AS RECORD NUMBER OF FAMILIES TAKE TO THE HIGHWAYS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON NEW REPORT SHOWS SHOCKING DISPARITY AMONG STATES IN BASIC HIGHWAY SAFETY LAWS

States' Mediocre Ratings in 2nd Annual Roadmap Is a Call to Action

Harris Poll Shows Strong Public Support For State Action Now

Washington, D.C. Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates) released its 2nd annual highway safety report, *2005 Roadmap to State Highway Safety Laws—Roadwork Ahead, the Unfinished Safety Agenda*, that rates each state and the District of Columbia (DC) on adoption of 14 basic highway safety laws. Not one state or DC has all 14 basic highway safety laws. In the report, only 13 states—Alabama, California, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, Washington—and DC got the highest rating for having made progress in advancing key laws to curb drunk driving, encourage seat belt and motorcycle helmet use, require booster seats for young children and protect new teen drivers. Seven states are dangerously lagging behind, with less than half of the 14 basic highway safety laws. Alaska, Arkansas, Montana, Rhode Island, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wyoming were given the lowest rating in the report. And the other 30 states have serious gaps in adoption of Advocates' recommended basic highway safety laws. Despite the slow progress of most states, a Lou Harris poll, released along with the Roadmap Report, shows strong public support for adoption of state laws that improve overall highway safety.

Judie Stone, president of Advocates said, "In 2004, we saw little improvement made among the states in adopting highway safety laws that reduce the number of deaths and injuries. Only one state adopted a primary enforcement seat belt law this year. At this rate it will be 2033 before every state protects their citizens with an effective seat belt law. Equally disturbing is that too many teens are dying in crashes and too few states have adequate laws to protect them. Governors and state legislators should use this report as a 'call to action' and quit delaying legislative adoption. We need less hand wringing and more bill signings."

"Amidst the confusion of grief, one thing stands clear, effective teenage driving laws need to be passed to protect teenagers," said Veronica Betancourt, sister of Alicia Betancourt, 16, who died as a passenger in a vehicle driven by a teenager in September of this year in Montgomery County, Maryland. "It's a bit on the obvious side, but I think current laws are not doing enough to safeguard our families."

A summary of the State Roadmap Report and Lou Harris Poll results show:

- **29 states do not have primary enforcement seat belt laws for adults.** When states pass primary enforcement seat belt laws, seat belt use increases by 10 to 15 percentage points. Tennessee was the only state in 2004 to pass a primary enforcement law. The Harris poll shows 80 percent of Americans say that seat belt enforcement should be treated like any other traffic safety law, meaning a police officer should be allowed to ticket motorists just for not wearing their seat belts.
- **30 states still need all-rider motorcycle helmet laws.** Louisiana reinstated its all-rider helmet law in 2004 after experiencing a 100 percent increase in motorcycle rider deaths since it repealed its law in 1999. Numerous states considered repealing existing all-rider helmet laws in 2004. According to the Harris Poll, 82 percent of Americans support all-rider helmet laws.

More

- **42 states need Advocates’ recommended optimal booster seat law protection for children ages 4 to 8.** While a total of 28 states and D.C. have booster seat laws, only eight states meet Advocates’ criteria and protect children ages 4 to 8—most cover only to age 6 or 7. In 2004, six states passed booster seat laws with only two including children up to age 8. The Harris poll showed 84% of the public support state enactment of booster seat laws for children ages 4 to 8.
- **No state meets Advocates’ recommended optimal teen Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) program with four key provisions, including 30-50 hours of supervisions and restrictions on the number of teen passengers.** Only six new GDL laws were adopted in four states in 2004.
- **States were rated on seven basic impaired driving laws.** This past year, all 50 states came into compliance with federal law for .08 percent blood alcohol concentration (BAC) when 5 states passed their .08 percent BAC laws. However, only 8 states acted on some of the basic impaired driving laws recommended by Advocates. According to the Harris Poll, 87 percent believe that more attention should be given to drunk driving. In 2003, 40 percent of highway deaths involved alcohol.

“As a former emergency department physician, I have witnessed firsthand the emotional toll of vehicle crashes on individuals and families”, said Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, executive director of the American Public Health Association. “Each year nearly 43,000 people die on our highways and 3 million more are injured. By any measure this is a public health epidemic and mostly preventable. It is time for Governors and state legislators to make enactment of these laws a priority.”

With most state legislatures convening in January, Advocates wrote to every Governor with a link to the report and urged each of them to make highway safety legislation a top priority.

Each year motor vehicle crashes cost society more than \$230 billion, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, imposing a “crash tax” of \$792 on every man, woman and child. “One of the most effective strategies in holding down insurance costs is loss prevention,” said Dale Hammond, President and COO, Kemper Auto & Home Group, Inc. (A Unitrin Company) and Insurance Co-Chair of Advocates. “Highway safety laws that curb drunk driving, require seat belt and motorcycle helmet use, and protect teen drivers will save lives and save taxpayer dollars.”

Advocates’ report divides the 14 laws into four issue categories. In each category, states are given one of three ratings based on how many optimal laws they have: Green (Good); Yellow (Caution); and Red (Danger).

Jack Gillis, Director of Public Affairs for the Consumer Federation of America said, “The Lou Harris poll shows once again that the public is ahead of elected leaders in supporting highway safety measures. Public support is strong but political will is weak.”

The 2005 Roadmap to State Highway Safety Laws and the *Lou Harris Public Opinion Poll* can be viewed on Advocates’ website at www.saferoads.org.

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Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), an alliance of consumer, health and safety groups and insurance companies and agents working together to make America’s roads safer, is actively involved at the federal and state levels to reduce the terrible tragedy of crashes to families across the nation. More information about the unfinished highway and auto safety agenda can be found on Advocates’ web site, www.saferoads.org.