



ADVOCATES
for Highway & Auto Safety

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**STATEMENT OF JACKIE GILLAN, PRESIDENT OF
ADVOCATES FOR HIGHWAY AND AUTO SAFETY
ON INCREASE IN TRAFFIC FATALITIES IN 2012**

Life-Saving Laws and Regulations Are Needed to Stop Preventable Losses

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) Today's release of 2012 data on motor vehicle crashes by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) showing a significant increase in highway deaths and injuries is disappointing and disturbing, especially when so many safety solutions are available but not being implemented. Last year, there were 33,561 deaths and 2.36 million injuries as a result of motor vehicle crashes. It is a clear call to continue our efforts to move the unfinished safety agenda forward. Next year, Congress will take up the multi-year, multi-billion dollar surface transportation reauthorization bill. This will be an excellent opportunity to enact lifesaving measures and stop unsafe proposals that will only lead to more deaths and injuries.

For example, the increase in truck crash deaths will hopefully halt efforts by special interests to dramatically increase the size and weights of trucks beyond what is currently allowed and to expand the use of large double- and triple-trailer trucks across the country. The public is very clear about their opposition to industry's relentless push to increase truck weights and allow longer trailers. The NHTSA data showing about 4,000 people killed in large truck crashes, including a nearly 9 percent increase in truck occupant deaths, only validates the public's fears about the dangers of oversized trucks. The public will be paying with their lives and their wallets if the trucking and shipping industries have their way and change current federal truck size and weight limits.

The jump in pedestrian deaths for the third consecutive year is another issue that Congress has the ability to address in next year's transportation bill by directing agency action on overdue and lifesaving improvements to vehicle design and roadway improvements. Crossing the street does not have to be a death sentence.

Governors and state legislators also should be held accountable and make adoption of commonsense and cost-effective state traffic safety laws a top priority. Drunk driving continues to be a serious problem on our streets and highways. The number of people killed in drunk driving crashes last year was 10,322, about a third of all highway deaths. Every state needs to adopt all offender ignition interlock laws to remove the deadly threat that impaired drivers pose to families in every state.

Additionally, Governors and state legislators need to stop the relentless assault on all-rider motorcycle helmet laws. In 2012, there were 4,957 motorcycle rider deaths, representing a 7.1 percent increase over 2011. According to NHTSA, ten times as many motorcycle riders died not wearing a helmet in states without an all-rider helmet law compared to states with this essential law. Yet, this year there were 19 bills introduced in 11 states (MD, MA, MO, NE, NV, NY, NC, OR, TN, VA, WA) to repeal existing universal helmet laws and only 3 states (IA, ME,

RI) considered adopting an all-rider law. All of the attempts to repeal helmet laws fortunately were defeated. After Michigan repealed its all-rider motorcycle helmet law in 2012, there was an 18 percent increase in motorcyclist fatalities. These repeals must stop as they lead to more deaths, injuries and costs to all taxpayers.

The 2012 fatality figures show some progress in the area of teen driving. Yet, there are still too many young people needlessly dying in crashes because state legislatures are slow to pass comprehensive laws to protect novice teen drivers. Laws that limit the number of passengers allowed in a vehicle with an inexperienced teen driver as well as restrict nighttime driving hours and cell phone use have proven to reduce distraction and save lives.

The death and injury toll on our highways last year also comes with an enormous economic and emotional cost for affected families and society. This is a major public health crisis by any measure and demands the attention of our elected leaders to implement programs, policies and laws that will save lives and save taxpayer dollars.

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (www.saferoads.org) is a coalition of consumer, public health, medical, safety and insurance organizations working together to improve highway and auto safety policies in Congress, states and Executive branch agencies.

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