

**Statement of
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Welcome. I am Judie Stone, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates). We are here today to release our second *Roadmap to State Highway Safety Laws* that gives ratings to states based on progress they have made in adopting 14 basic highway safety laws. We also are releasing the results of a Lou Harris poll on public attitudes about highway safety laws. Both reports can be found on our web site, www.saferoads.org.

This coming holiday season more than 63 million travelers will be on our highways. Most would be shocked to know that they will be driving in states that lack some of the most fundamental safety laws to curb drunk driving, require the use of seat belts or motorcycle helmets, and protect new teen drivers. Our state law report and Lou Harris poll show that when it comes to state highway safety laws, public opinion is strong but political will is weak.

Some good news: We dropped .08 BAC laws from this year's list because all 50 states now have the law, truly making .08 the law of the land. This occurred because of federal leadership requiring all states to have the law by 2004 or be penalized highway construction funds.

The bad news is that there has been little progress in state adoption of 14 basic highway safety laws in the past year. Only one state passed a primary enforcement belt law, a handful of states merely tinkered with their graduated driver licensing laws, and although one state reinstated their all-rider helmet law, we had to fight off helmet repeal efforts in several states. Of the eight states adopting important booster seat laws, only two states cover children up to 8 years of age.

In short, the legislative landscape of highway safety laws hasn't changed much for the better since we last issued the report in January.

You will find ratings for each state's laws in each of four categories: adult occupant protection, child passenger safety, teen driving and impaired driving. The state gets either a Green dot (for good), a Yellow dot (for caution), or a Red dot (for danger). The ratings are based on the **number of optimal laws** that Advocates has defined in the report on Page 39, and the ratings take into consideration whether or not a state has strong **occupant protection laws**.

13 states and DC received a Green rating, and 7 received a Red. The remaining 30 states are Yellow, indicating some progress but numerous gaps in their highway safety laws, so there is much roadwork ahead.

Who are the best states? North Carolina, California, New Jersey, Tennessee, Washington, and the District of Columbia.

Who are the worst states? Wyoming, Montana, West Virginia, Rhode Island.

A particular area of concern is teen driving, or graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws. Every year more than 6,000 teens die in motor vehicle crashes in this nation, a totally unacceptable toll. That is 115 teens killed every week of the year. If you include all deaths involving a teen driver, the number is nearly 9,000.

Too many teens are needlessly dying on our roads and too few states are passing effective laws that require more hours of experience behind the wheel, curfews and restrictions on passengers. In fact, no state has adopted all four of Advocates' recommended criteria for a GDL law.

In the Washington metropolitan area alone, there have been 17 teen deaths, just since school began in September. This is not unique to our area. Teens are dying in communities all over the country. Most involve inexperience, speed, alcohol and late night driving. Research and experience show that strong GDL laws make a difference.

You will be hearing from Veronica Betancourt later, whose sister, Alicia, is one of those 17 local young people lost to a grieving family, community and nation.

States are graded in this report on their current GDL laws, but as we search for better solutions to cure this public health epidemic that is killing our teens, we should be upgrading even the current optimum criteria for GDL programs, such as increasing the mandatory supervised driving hours beyond the 30 to 50 hours recommended and include night time supervised driving hours. Another improvement needed is extending the number of months for the learning period beyond 6 months.

Reliable research tells us teens are easily distracted by other teen passengers, so let's not allow any teen passengers in the car with a new teen driver on the road, on their own. This protects teen drivers and teen passengers. Most European and other countries are way ahead of the United States on placing commonsense, lifesaving restrictions on teens learning to drive and states would be wise to move quickly to adopt these tougher safety protections.