

STATEMENT OF
Arturo Betancourt, M.D., and Family
December 16, 2004

On September 24 shortly before dinner, a friend of my daughter, Alicia Maria, phoned. He asked her if she wanted to join a group of friends who were in a nearby mall, maybe a movie and some ice cream. After many questions we finally gave our consent. The boy came to the door as he was expected and the last thing my wife asked was "Are you a good driver?" to which he responded, "I think so." Having agreed to an 11:30 pm curfew they both left.

On the way back at 11:24 pm, less than 2 miles from the house while speeding, the driver lost control of the automobile. He struck a utility post. The impact was such that my daughter died instantly.

Alicia was an excellent student. At school she was enrolled in all honors or Advanced Placement courses. She loved to dance and was a member of the Pom squad. She was very talented in the visual arts. After a pre-college program this summer at the Maryland Institute College of Arts in Baltimore she was awarded a \$12,000.00 scholarship had she decided to attend in 2006. But her biggest talent was making those around her feel happy and accepted. Once a friend asked her why she smiled so much, and she answered "Because when I smile I make other people happy and that makes me happy". In talking to many of Alicia's friends we have been surprised as to the number that considered her their best friend. They say that she always listened, that she was tolerant, and that she never judged. Alicia was truly a great kid, always doing what was right, perhaps that made her death all the more shocking to all. Everybody was stunned.

She touched many hearts in her short life, and her passing left a huge void in all of us. We miss her joy and her smile, her jokes that only she could get. The wailing that she thought was singing but to which we laughed because she was genuinely having fun. We miss her face every night at the dinner table.

The death of a child has to be one of the most devastating events in the life of a family. No one is prepared to see two police officers approach you in the early hours of the morning and already know that you will never see your daughter again before they utter a word.

In reviewing the accident I discovered that there were many factors that came together that evening that led to that tragic event. The driver a 16 year old, with a little over 5 months driving experience was driving a manual transmission automobile for which he had a little over a months' practice. He was speeding on a dark road and according to the police not wearing his seat belt. My daughter was wearing hers but that was not enough.

In order to prevent other parents, brothers and sisters from experiencing this horrible event I feel that it is time for parents and legislators to change our current driving laws. I would like to see a graduated driving law starting at 17, with full license at 18. The number of hours of supervised driving to include night driving increased. Teens should take a defensive driving course that really teaches them the skills they need to drive in this dangerous environment. The driving test should measure your true driving ability. The use of cell phones during the provisional license should be prohibited. During the provisional driving period the teen should not transport other teens, except for family members. During the provisional driving period there should be no night driving without a licensed driver over the age of 21. Making any one of these last two changes would have saved my daughter's life.

Our teens need to remember that they are neither invincible nor immortal, that this could happen to any of them. If this happened to my daughter it could happen to anyone.