

Senate Version Of SAFETEA Places Drunk Driving At Forefront Of Highway Safety Bill

MADD Thanks Senate Leaders For Hard Work

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DALLAS (May 19, 2005) -- A new tea in town is creating quite a buzz....drunk driving is not acceptable. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) applauds the Senate for passing the Safe Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2005 (SAFETEA) that includes key alcohol-impaired driving provisions that will help save lives and prevent injuries. MADD encourages conferees to include these lifesaving provisions in the final conference report and the Administration to sign into law this pivotal piece of lifesaving legislation that will help stop alcohol-impaired driving.

"Too many victims/survivors have tragic stories to tell about how drunk driving impacted their families," said Wendy J. Hamilton, MADD national president. "In 2004 alone, MADD served more than 31,000 victims of drunk driving. This bill provides a foundation to combat drunk driving, the nation's most frequently committed violent crime, and in turn, save lives and prevent injuries."

MADD applauds U.S. Senators Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), Mike DeWine (R-OH), Byron Dorgan (D-ND), Jon Corzine (D-NJ), John Warner (R-VA), Chairman and Ranking Members of the Senate committees on Commerce and Environment and Public Works, as well as other Senate leaders for their diligent work on the issue of drunk driving.

The Senate version of the House passed transportation bill (H.R.3) ensuring that repeat offenders, high Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) (.15 percent or higher) drivers and those driving on suspended licenses due to prior DUIs do not get behind the wheel by encouraging states to pass consistent higher-risk driver laws. The provision, which had included repeat offenders, now includes high BAC offenders and those driving on suspended licenses and calls for restrictions on driving, restitution to the community and recovery provisions for those arrested. Science-based strategies such as license suspension, installment of certified alcohol ignition interlock systems on offenders' vehicles, incarceration, as well as substance abuse assessment and treatment are recommended in the provision.

Hamilton added, "Including high BAC offenders in the higher risk driver amendment to the safety bill is particularly important because high BAC offenders often drive drunk many times before they are ever caught and over half of all alcohol-related traffic fatalities involve drivers at .15 BAC or higher."

Also, the Senate bill includes funding for law enforcement mobilizations, incentives for states to pass primary seat belt laws, and measures for requiring greater accountability in the use of safety funding by federal and state officials.

In an effort to ensure all drivers think twice before driving drunk, research proves that general deterrence strategies such as law enforcement mobilizations, including high-visibility sobriety checkpoints, prevent people from driving drunk. On average, sobriety checkpoints help reduce alcohol-related traffic crashes by 20 percent. This bill would ensure that there are funds to support law enforcement mobilizations, such as checkpoints.

"Victim families feel added pain and anger upon learning that the offender who killed their loved one had multiple DUIs and/or a high BAC," said Hamilton. "MADD has advocated for tougher

sanctions for higher risk drivers for years and we are glad to hear that federal steps are being taken to make the roads safer from these individuals, as well as aim to prevent future drunk driving crashes."

On September 19, 1984, a crash killed Hamilton's sister Becky and her 22-month-old nephew Timmy. Becky's car was struck by a drunk driver with a high blood alcohol level (.16 percent). The offender served only 11 months in prison. "America must continue to send a message this kind of disregard for human life will not be tolerated."