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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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# **TOUGH NEW TEEN DRINKING** **& DRIVING LAW GOES INTO EFFECT** **NEXT WEEK IN VIRGINIA**

## ***JULY 1<sup>ST</sup> LAW MANDATES YEAR-LONG DRIVER'S LICENSE SUSPENSION AND ELEVATES CRIME FOR UNDERAGE DRINKERS WHO DRIVE***

**Richmond, VA, June 23** – Effective next week, teens convicted in Virginia of driving after consuming virtually *any* amount of alcohol will lose their driver's licenses for a year and be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

Specifically – and as a result of a 2008 Virginia General Assembly bill (HB 719) signed into law this past spring by Virginia Governor Tim Kaine (D) – a new Virginia law going into effect on July 1, 2008 doubles the current driver's license suspension period (to one year) for teens convicted of driving with virtually any amount of alcohol in their systems as well as elevates such already unlawful act to a Class 1 misdemeanor.

***“This is a tremendous strengthening of Virginia's zero-tolerance laws when it comes to drinking and driving by the very population too young to purchase, possess, consume and transport alcohol in the first place, Virginia's teens,”*** said Kurt Gregory Erickson, President of the nonprofit and Virginia-based

Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP), registered Virginia lobbyist and proponent of House Bill 719.

Currently in Virginia, persons under 21 convicted of driving with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .02 -- but less than Virginia's current per se statute of .08 BAC when *all* drivers are presumed to be driving while intoxicated -- are penalized with a six-month driver's license suspension and a “fine of not more than \$ 500.”

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, a 120-pound male or female would reach a BAC of .02 after consuming just one drink in one hour.<sup>1</sup>  
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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/alcohol/impaired\\_driving/appendix.html](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/alcohol/impaired_driving/appendix.html)

page two

According to Virginia's Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services' 2005 Virginia Community Youth Survey, alcohol is the "most commonly used substance" by Virginia teens citing that 76-percent of Virginia's high school seniors and 64-percent of the Commonwealth's 10<sup>th</sup> graders reported using alcohol. In addition, more than one-quarter (27.8%) of Virginia's 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported consuming five or more drinks in a row within the reporting period's past two weeks. Perhaps most insightful, this most recent, state indicator of substance abuse amongst Virginia's teens found that levels of alcohol use amongst the Commonwealth's youth has remained unchanged for the last half-decade (2000 - 2005).<sup>2</sup>

In addition and according to the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, alcohol-related traffic fatalities involving teens in the state went up 43-percent in 2006 (the latest figures available) – nearly tripling the rate of increase in such fatalities amongst all age drivers in Virginia.<sup>3</sup>

Founded in 1982, the non-profit and McLean, Virginia-based Washington Regional Alcohol Program is a two-time winner of Virginia's prestigious Governor's Transportation Safety Award as well project manager of the Commonwealth's statewide *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign. As a public-private partnership, WRAP works to prevent drunk driving and underage drinking in the Washington-metropolitan area including in Northern Virginia however the organization may best be known to area residents via its popular free cab ride service for would-be drunk drivers, *SoberRide*.

For more information, visit WRAP's web site at [www.wrap.org](http://www.wrap.org).

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dmhmrhas.virginia.gov/documents/reports/OSAS-CommunityYouthSurvey2005.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.dmvnow.com/webdoc/safety/crash\\_data/crash\\_facts/index.asp](http://www.dmvnow.com/webdoc/safety/crash_data/crash_facts/index.asp)