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DUI BILLS ADVANCE IN VIRGINIA

AT SESSION'S DEADLINE, LAWMAKERS OK BILLS MANDATING INTERLOCKS FOR FIRST-TIME OFFENDERS AND JAIL FOR DEATH-CAUSING OFFENDERS

Richmond, VA, February 13 – With tomorrow's cross-over deadline looming, Virginia lawmakers have already given preliminary approval to a spectrum of anti-drunk driving bills including those requiring ignition interlocks for all persons convicted of drunk driving in the state and mandating jail for DUI offenders causing death on the Commonwealth's roadways.

“Virginia's patience with the more than 29,000 drivers in the state annually convicted of driving under the influence has worn thin,” said Kurt Gregory Erickson, President of the nonprofit and Virginia-based Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP), registered Virginia lobbyist and proponent of this year's advancing DUI bills.

Today and following Virginia's House of Delegates passing similar legislation (HB 279) last week, Virginia's Senate passed a bill (SB 378) which, if signed into law, would require all persons convicted of drunk driving in Virginia to outfit their motor vehicle with a breath test device preventing them from operating the vehicle if alcohol is detected. The devices otherwise known as ignition interlocks would be required for a minimum of six months.

Virginia Governor Robert McDonnell (R) supports this year's interlock bills which have been long championed by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and other traffic safety organizations as a means of combating impaired driving.

Members of Virginia's General Assembly this session have also given preliminary approval to legislation seeking to increase the penalties for the Commonwealth's more egregious DUI offenders. Specifically, lawmakers have advanced a bill to mandate a minimum of one year incarceration for those convicted of DUI manslaughter (HB 49) in the state. The House bill was unanimously reported out of committee last week and is expected to be voted on by Virginia's House of Delegates tomorrow in Richmond.

Tomorrow is Virginia's General Assembly's cross-over deadline – that period when each chamber must complete work on its own introduced legislation before advancing bills “cross-over” to the other house.

Other DUI and or underage drinking bills moving forward in Virginia this year are measures proposing to: extend Virginia's “zero-tolerance” (.02 BAC) restriction for DUI offenders for two years (HB 957 – passed House Courts unanimously and is currently before that chamber's Appropriations Committee); have the community services board provide to Virginia hospitals information about alcohol and substance abuse services for minors (HB 1075 & SB 201 – both bills passed their respective chambers on unanimous votes); and allow underage persons participating in ABC sting operations to legally purchase and or possess alcohol (HB 1091 & SB 406 – both bills also passed their respective chambers on unanimous votes).

Conversely, DUI and or underage drinking legislation killed or otherwise dead in Virginia's 2012 General Assembly session include bills proposing to: disallow open containers of alcohol in the passenger areas of motor vehicles (SB 289); lengthen Virginia's administrative license revocation period for a DUI from seven to 60 days (SB 208); mandate I.D. checks for persons believed to be underage attempting to purchase alcohol (HB 1163); destroy juvenile records for possession of alcohol not at 19 (current) but at 21 years of age (HB 747); and convert the Virginia Alcohol Safety Action Program (VASAP) from a legislative agency to that under Virginia's Criminal Justice Services Board (SB 501).

In 2010, 274 persons were killed in Virginia in alcohol-related traffic crashes according to the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles. Despite Virginia's recent three consecutive year (2008-2010) decrease in alcohol-related traffic fatalities, the Commonwealth today averages an alcohol-related traffic crash every 64-minutes (8,221 in 2010) and a DUI conviction every three hours (29,063 in 2010). In addition, last month, the national Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (a coalition of insurance, consumer, health, safety and law enforcement organizations) ranked Virginia amongst the lowest of U.S. states for it failing to adopt key traffic safety and impaired driving laws including those concerning open containers and ignition interlocks.

Commemorating its 30th year in 2012, 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**.