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# MARYLAND LAWMAKERS ADVANCE KEY DUI BILL

## *MEASURE LOOKS TO CRACK-DOWN ON REPEAT DRUNK DRIVERS IN STATE*

**Annapolis, MD, March 27** – Maryland lawmakers today gave preliminary approval to a bill increasing the penalties for persons repeatedly convicted of drunk driving in the state.

House Bill 957, introduced by Delegate Geraldine Valentino-Smith (D-Prince George's County) and which would increase the maximum allowable sentences for repeatedly convicted impaired drivers so as to eliminate any incentive to refuse a BAC test and later be convicted of the lesser penalty crimes of "driving while impaired by alcohol (21-902[b]) or any controlled dangerous substance (21-902[d])" passed out of the Maryland Senate's Judicial Proceedings Committee today and now heads to the floor of the Senate for that chamber's consideration.

*(Another House bill before the Senate's Judicial Proceedings Committee but not voted on today is Delegate Sam Arora's [D-Montgomery County] HB 1015 which would expand Maryland's current universe of offenders subject to ignition interlock devices to include persons convicted of drunk driving while also transporting a minor [21-902{a3}{b2}].)*

Delegate Valentino-Smith's bill already passed Maryland's House of Delegates on a unanimous vote earlier this month.

**"Passing House Bill 957 levels the playing field regarding the application of penalties for repeatedly convicted impaired drivers in Maryland,"** said Kurt Gregory Erickson, President of the Maryland nonprofit Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP), registered Maryland lobbyist and proponent of the 2014 bill. **"Without its passage, Maryland not only preserves a loophole too often used by career drunk drivers to escape meaningful penalties but also sadly solidifies Maryland's top-ten position amongst U.S. states in having one of the highest BAC test refusal rates in the country."**

The advancing "repeat drunk driver bill," supported by Maryland's State's Attorneys' Association amongst other organizations, addresses the disparities between the maximum allowable sentences for the crimes of driving under the influence of alcohol (21-902a), driving while impaired by alcohol (21-902b), driving while impaired by drugs (21-902c) and driving while impaired by controlled dangerous substances (21-902d) relative to the current incentive for the repeatedly convicted impaired driver to refuse a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) test in hopes of being convicted, at worst for them, a lesser 21-902 offense.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data consistently cites Maryland as being amongst the top ten states in having the highest BAC test refusal rate in the country. Worse and according to 2013 Maryland State Police data, nearly a third (30.85%) of persons detained for impaired driving in Maryland refuse a BAC test. As such proposes the elimination of any incentive to refuse a BAC test (and later be convicted of that lesser 21-902 offense), Valentino-Smith's bill also responds to a specific recommendation made by the Maryland General Assembly-created Task Force to Combat Driving Under the Influence of Drugs and Alcohol (a 23-member body unanimously approved by both Maryland's Senate and House of Delegates and consisting of representatives from Maryland's judicial, legislative, law enforcement, health, hospitality and traffic safety sectors including WRAP). Specifically and amongst the 42 recommendations made to Governor Martin O'Malley in October 2008, Maryland's "DUI Task Force" recommended strategies for "lowering Maryland's high (BAC test) refusal rate."

Founded in 1982, the Maryland nonprofit Washington Regional Alcohol Program is an award-winning public-private partnership working to prevent drunk driving and underage drinking in the Washington-metropolitan area. Through public education, innovative health education programs and advocacy, WRAP is credited with keeping the metro-Washington area's alcohol-related traffic deaths consistently lower than the national average. WRAP, however, may best be known to area residents via the organization's 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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