

CONTACT: Kurt Gregory Erickson
President

PHONE: W. 703/893-0461
CELL. 703/625-2303

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MARYLAND LAWMAKERS

ADVANCE DUI BILLS TODAY

MEASURES LOOK TO CRACK-DOWN ON BOTH REPEAT IMPAIRED DRIVERS & DUI OFFENDERS WITH CHILDREN IN CAR

Annapolis, MD, April 7 – Maryland lawmakers today approved bills both increasing the penalties for persons repeatedly convicted of impaired driving in the state as well as mandating ignition interlock devices for persons convicted of alcohol-impaired driving while transporting a child.

House Bill 1015, introduced for the third consecutive year by Delegate Sam Arora (D-Montgomery County) and 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(A)(3) or (B)(2)], was approved today by Maryland's Senate. HB 1015 passed Maryland's House of Delegates last month receiving a unanimous vote.

House Bill 957, introduced by Delegate Geraldine Valentino-Smith (D-Prince George's County) and which would increase the maximum allowable penalties for persons repeatedly convicted of driving while impaired by either alcohol or drugs [21-902(B) or (C)] was also passed today by Maryland's Senate. HB 957 passed Maryland's House of Delegates last month receiving a unanimous vote. (Cross-filed legislation [SB 710, Senator Jennie Forehand, D-Montgomery County], passed by Maryland's Senate on Saturday, was still up for consideration in Maryland's House which was meeting this evening.)

Both bills now go to Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley's (D) desk for his consideration of signing into law.

Last week, Maryland lawmakers also advanced legislation (**Senate Bill 87**, Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee) which would require persons repeatedly convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol [21-902(A)] and subject to the state's ignition interlock program to mandate the same in-car breathalyzers for work vehicles that the offender might use. SB 87 also is en route to Governor O'Malley's desk.

“On average, someone in Maryland is arrested every 19 hours for impaired driving while also transporting a minor,” said Kurt Gregory Erickson, President of the Maryland nonprofit Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP), registered Maryland lobbyist and proponent of both bills. ***“House Bill 1015 addresses this egregious crime while simultaneously addressing the fact that such unlawful actions are on the rise in Maryland.”***

The University of Maryland’s National Study Center for Trauma and Emergency Medical Systems cited that Maryland recorded 465 arrests in 2012 for driving while impaired by alcohol and or drugs while also transporting a minor. The National Study Center’s findings also conclude that the crime of DUI [21-902(A)] in Maryland whilst transporting a minor is on the rise as citations for such have increased by double digit figures (20.94%) between 2009 and 2012.

The advancing repeat impaired 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 [21-902(A)], driving while impaired by alcohol [21-902(B)], driving while impaired by drugs [21-902(C)] and driving while impaired by controlled dangerous substances [21-902(D)] relative to the current incentive for the repeatedly convicted impaired driver to refuse a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) test in hopes of being convicted of, at worst for them, a lesser penalty 21-902 offense.

“This bill levels the playing field regarding the application of penalties for repeatedly convicted impaired drivers in Maryland,” said Erickson. ***“Without its passage, Maryland would’ve not only preserved a loophole too often used by career drunk drivers to escape meaningful penalties but would have also sadly solidified Maryland’s top-ten position amongst U.S. states in having one of the highest BAC test refusal rates in the country.”***

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.

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