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Maryland's Back Roads Offer No Escape for Drunk Drivers ***2008 Checkpoint Strikeforce Campaign Kicks Off in State***

Sykesville, Md. – The Maryland Chiefs of Police Association and the Maryland Department of Transportation joined forces today with State Attorney General Douglas F. Gansler in kicking off Maryland's 2008 *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign. This weekend, law enforcement agencies in three-quarters of Maryland's jurisdictions will take part in a regional initiative to stop drunk driving on rural roads. Data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration shows that more than half (55 percent) of the nation's 2006 traffic fatalities occurred on rural roads. In Maryland, the proportion of impaired drivers involved in crashes is more than 50 percent higher in the rural areas.

"There is no excuse for driving under the influence and drunk drivers won't be able to hide on the back roads of Maryland," stated Chief Jeffrey Spaulding, President, Maryland Chiefs of Police and Chief of Police, Westminster Police Department. "We know the danger posed by drunk drivers and we will continue to do all we can to identify and apprehend them."

"When Maryland law enforcement agencies make arrests, prosecutors will come down hard on those who choose to drink and drive. When they come to court, violators will learn that the drunk driving penalties can cost them much more than a ticket or fine," said State Attorney General Gansler.

Preliminarily, the 2007 data for Maryland reveals that the number of alcohol-related traffic fatalities in the state was slightly higher than in 2006, but has remained relatively stagnant. This information is both alarming and troubling to law enforcement and state officials who want to bring an end to these preventable deaths. With Labor Day weekend right around the corner – historically one of the deadliest drunk driving holiday weekends of the year – *Checkpoint Strikeforce* has begun a five-month, statewide campaign to reduce the incidence of drunken driving. This statewide campaign combines proactive public education and enforcement efforts in order to raise public awareness of drunk driving.

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A public opinion survey of Maryland drivers, conducted in July 2008 for *Checkpoint Strikeforce*, found that drivers strongly support the use of sobriety checkpoints. Among those surveyed, the majority not only perceived drunk driving as one of most *serious* dangers facing drivers, but also that behavior resulting from drunk driving is one of the most *dangerous*. Respondents considered two lane rural highways the most difficult to navigate under the influence.

Maryland State Highway Administrator Neil Pedersen, who is also the Governor's Highway Safety representative said, "Alcohol-related fatalities are preventable and unacceptable. While law enforcement does everything possible to keep drunk drivers off of our roadways, we also want to encourage motorists to take back the roads and report drunk drivers by calling 911. We all share a responsibility for safe roads – choose to drive sober, choose safety for life."

Along with the *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign, Maryland will hold at least one sobriety checkpoint or saturation patrol each week for the rest of the year. In addition, local law enforcement around the State will deploy additional forces in the rural areas this weekend in support of a regional crackdown on 'country roads'. Studies have shown that aggressively deployed sobriety checkpoints can result in a 20 percent reduction in alcohol-related fatal crashes. In 2007, Maryland law enforcement conducted more than 500 sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols, resulting in more than 600 DWI arrests, nearly 300 criminal arrests and in excess of 3,000 traffic violations.

Concurrent with the state's *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign, Maryland is addressing the issue of impaired driving through the *Task Force to Combat Driving Under the Influence of Drugs and Alcohol*. Signed into law by Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley in May 2007, the 21-member task force is scheduled to make its final recommendations to the governor this fall. These recommendations are anticipated to address the largely unchanged number of drunk driving deaths occurring annually on the state's roadways in the last half-decade which average 245 such fatalities per year, according to Maryland's National Study Center for Trauma.

In addition to sobriety checkpoints and patrols, Maryland *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign is using ads in combination with other statewide outreach efforts in a robust \$400,000 effort to remind citizens of the many dangers and consequences of impaired driving. Throughout the next several months, nearly 9,000 radio and television spots will run throughout Maryland and will target the most feared result of impaired driving: killing or injuring someone else.

The Checkpoint Strikeforce campaign is one component of the State's overall Choose Safety for Life campaign, which urges all drivers, pedestrians and cyclists to B-SAFE: Buckle up, Slow down-speeding kills, Always drive sober, Focus and Everyone share the road. More information can be found at www.choosesafetyforlife.com.

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Listen to the ads and get more information at <http://www.checkpointstrikeforce.net/educate.html>

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