

CONTACT: Kurt Gregory Erickson
President

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 4, 2008

VIRGINIA SENATE PASSES TOUGH TEEN DRINKING & DRIVING BILL

MEASURE PROVIDES FOR YEAR-LONG DRIVER'S LICENSE SUSPENSION AND ELEVATED MISDEMEANOR STATUS FOR UNDERAGE DRINKERS WHO DRIVE

Richmond, VA, Mar. 4 – Teens in Virginia convicted 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 if a bill passed today by Virginia's Senate becomes law. An earlier version of the bill already passed Virginia's House of Delegates last month.

Proposing a doubling of 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 elevating such an already unlawful act to a Class 1 misdemeanor, Virginia's Senate today passed Delegate Bill Janis' (R-Glen Allen) House Bill 719 on a unanimous, 40-0 chamber vote.

"If signed into law, 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 a proponent of anti-drunk driving and underage drinking legislation.

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.¹

Virginia's House of Delegates passed an earlier version of Janis' bill last month capturing 96-percent of that chamber's vote. The bill, amended in the Senate to both allow 50 hours of community service in lieu of the newly proposed \$ 250 fine as well as provide for a 2010 sunset clause to evaluate any impact the potential new law might have on Virginia's compliance with federal Department of Justice policies -- specifically with the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency

(more)

¹ http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/alcohol/impaired_driving/appendix.html

Prevention Act of 2002 which, according to Virginia's Department of Criminal Justice Services, "requires that children who have committed an offense that would not be criminal if committed by an adult [status offenses] such as truancy or running away, and non-offenders, like abused and neglected children, will not be placed in secure detention facilities or secure correctional facilities"² – now goes back to Virginia's House where neither the bill's sponsor nor WRAP anticipate objection to the Senate's amendments.

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 10th graders reported using alcohol. In addition, more than one-quarter (27.8%) of Virginia's 12th 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).³

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.⁴

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.

#

² <http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/juvenile/jjdp/?menuLevel=5&mID=9>

³ <http://www.dmhmrzas.virginia.gov/documents/reports/OSAS-CommunityYouthSurvey2005.pdf>

⁴ http://www.dmvnow.com/webdoc/safety/crash_data/crash_facts/index.asp