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MARYLAND GOVERNOR SIGNS **BILL CREATING DUI TASK FORCE**

EFFORT TO ADDRESS STATE'S RECENT STAGNATION IN REDUCING DUI DEATHS

Annapolis, MD, May 17 – In his final, ceremonial bill signing of 2007 Maryland General Assembly legislation, Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley (D) today signed into law bills creating a statewide task force to address drunk driving in Maryland.

Hailed by a number of anti-drunk driving organizations and advocates as essential and unanimously passed in both Maryland's House of Delegates and Senate earlier this year, O'Malley signed into law two (cross-filed) bills thereby creating a "Task Force to Combat Driving Under the Influence of Drugs and Alcohol" (**SB 198**, Forehand, D-Montgomery County and **HB 758**, Dumais, D-Montgomery County) at a formal State House bill signing ceremony in Annapolis this morning.

"A top-to-bottom review of Maryland's efforts to combat drunk driving is simply overdue," said Kurt Gregory Erickson, President of the Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP), registered Maryland lobbyist and a proponent of the task force bills. ***"The case for such is based on the realities that drunk driving continues to be one of Maryland's most frequently committed violent crimes; that the number of annual drunk driving deaths in the state have remained largely stagnant for the last half-decade; and that a similar task force effort hasn't been undertaken in Maryland in nearly two decades."***

Both bills create a "Task Force to Combat Driving Under the Influence of Drugs and Alcohol" and are in response to what advocates have bemoaned as Maryland's recent inability to lower the number of traffic fatalities attributable to alcohol. According to the University of Maryland's National Study Center for Trauma, Maryland's number of drunk driving deaths on the state's roadways have remained largely unchanged in the last half-decade averaging 245 such fatalities annually.

Maryland's anti-drunk driving organizations under the umbrella of the more than 280-member Maryland Impaired Driving Coalition also advocated that a statewide DUI task force would create both a momentum and set of recommendations overcoming what these organizations say has been Maryland's piecemeal approach to passing drunk driving laws in the state.

According to WRAP, all of Maryland's neighboring states (DC/DE/PA/VA) have: higher penalties for refusing a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) test; higher DUI fines; and more

comprehensive and tougher penalty structures for high BAC drunk drivers. (Both repeat drunk drivers and high-BAC drunk drivers are overrepresented in alcohol-related, fatal traffic crashes.) In addition, the majority of Maryland's neighboring states have more comprehensive and tougher penalty structures for repeat drunk drivers (DC/PA/VA) and more mandatory alcohol assessment and treatment for DUI offenders (DE/PA/VA) according to WRAP.

Data from the University of Maryland's National Study Center for Trauma also shows that of its neighboring states, Maryland pays the second highest per capita costs for alcohol-related traffic crashes.

WRAP, which served as a member of then Virginia Governor Mark Warner's (D) similarly-named 2002 Task Force to Combat Driving Under the Influence of Drugs and Alcohol, stresses that task forces work citing that since the formation of Virginia's work group, Virginia is the only neighboring state of Maryland both posting three consecutive years of declining drunk driving deaths as well as having the lowest alcohol-related traffic fatality rate of all of Maryland's neighbors. Virginia also has the lowest per capita costs for alcohol-related traffic crashes according to UMD figures.

"A comprehensive effort to assess how Maryland may better address a killer which claims a life every 37-hours hasn't been undertaken in 19 years," said Erickson referencing Maryland's last (1988) "Task Force on Drunk and Drugged Driving." ***"Both Governor O'Malley as well as members of Maryland's General Assembly should be commended for their advancement of this potentially lifesaving legislation."***

Founded in 1982, the Maryland non-profit Washington Regional Alcohol Program is an award-winning public-private partnership working to prevent drunk driving and underage drinking in the Washington-metropolitan area including in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. In addition to WRAP serving as project manager of Maryland's *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign – and 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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