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National Teen Driver Safety Week Marked by Parents Urge Congress To Pass Safe Teen Driving Bill

***More Than 5,600 People Are Killed Each Year in Crashes Involving Teen Drivers;
Motor Vehicle Crashes are the Leading Cause of Death for Teens in Every State***

Washington, D.C. (October 18, 2011) – Parents of children killed in teen-related crashes joined today to mark “National Teen Driver Safety Week”, October 16-22, and to urge Congress to pass federal legislation to protect new teen drivers.

Bipartisan legislation known as the STANDUP Act (Safe Teen And Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act (H.R. 1515/ S.528) has been introduced in the House by Rep. Tim Bishop (D-NY) and Rep. Hultgren (R-IL) and in the Senate by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) as well as Senator Klobuchar (D-MN). A letter, signed by 29 parents from across the country, was sent to each Member of Congress, calling for quick action on this lifesaving legislation. (Parents’ letter is available at (www.saferoads4teens.org).

“More than 70 teens will needlessly die in crashes this week,” said Jackie Gillan, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety. “There is no better way for each Member of Congress to acknowledge National Teen Driver Safety Week than by co-sponsoring and working to pass the STANDUP Act.”

The STANDUP Act would set minimum standards for state graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws for beginning teen drivers. The STANDUP Act would encourage states to adopt teen driving laws that include a minimum age of 16 for learner’s permits and restrictions on the number of teen passengers, cell phone use, and nighttime driving until drivers reach age 18.

Alan Brown of Cartersville, Georgia, lost his 17-year-old son, Joshua, in a 2003 crash. “Since Joshua’s death, every week has become teen driver safety week to me. I have dedicated my life to ensuring that other parents are spared the tragic loss of a child, and I believe the STANDUP Act will go a long way to making every teen in every state safer.”

Nearly eight years ago, Jim Portell’s 15-year-old daughter, Jamie, died in a car full of teens that rolled over, ejecting all five unbelted occupants. Portell believes that his daughter would be alive today if STANDUP had been enacted. “I want to use Jamie’s death to protect teens and spare parents and families my profound loss,” he said from his home in Davenport, Florida. “No one should have to suffer such pain and suffering and they don’t have to if we have strong laws. Jamie was not just my daughter, she was my best friend.”

Eilene and Bob Okerblom of Santa Maria, California, lost their 19-year-old son Eric in 2009 when the bicycle he was riding was struck by a distracted teen driver. “We vaccinate our children to keep

them safe and healthy from disease. But car crashes are the number one killer of teens, more than any disease. STANDUP is the vaccine against teen crashes, and every teen should get its benefit."

Numerous studies have shown that comprehensive GDL laws are effective at preventing crashes among novice teen drivers, reducing injuries, and saving lives. States that have implemented strong laws have experienced reductions in the number of teen driver crashes by as much as 30 percent, as well as decreases in the number of teen motor vehicle fatalities, some by more than 40 percent.

The STANDUP Act is supported by the Saferoads4teens Coalition, a diverse group of consumer, safety, medical, law enforcement, teen, and parent organizations, as well as insurance companies and automotive industry representatives.

National Teen Driver Safety Week, established by Congress in 2007, is dedicated to raising awareness and seeking solutions to unnecessary teen deaths on the road. Held during the third week of October, this year's theme is supporting parents in teaching their teens to drive.

For more information, please go to www.saferoads4teens.org.

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