

**STATEMENT OF**  
**Commander Tom Didone, Montgomery County Police Department**  
**On the Introduction of the**  
**Safe Teen And Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act (H.R. 1895)**  
**United States Capitol, Washington, D.C.**  
**April 23, 2009**

When I was asked to come here today to share with you some of the devastating effects of motor vehicle crashes, I was hesitant to accept the invitation. It has been less than seven months since we received the terrible news that my 15-year-old son, Ryan, had become one of this year's thousands of fatality statistics in one of these crashes, and I thought it was too soon to talk publicly about it.

But since my job with the Montgomery County Police Department has focused for many years on the issues of traffic safety law enforcement, it was apparent to me that these issues are simply too important for me to say "no".

Ryan was the kind of kid it's impossible not to like. He loved motorcross; he was active in church. The crash that took Ryan's life happened in the evening of October 20, on a curvy road in Montgomery County. He was one of five teenagers in the car that night, heading from a church youth meeting to get something to eat. The car veered off the road, hitting a tree, killing Ryan and injuring the other kids. Despite years of warnings from me, it appears that Ryan wasn't wearing his seatbelt. If this can happen to my son, it can happen to anybody.

It is true that there are laws already in place in Maryland; the young driver and passengers should have been obeying them that day in October. Ryan was certainly aware of the laws and why our state adopted them. What went wrong? I ask myself this question every day. As a father who happens to be a traffic enforcement official, I know how very complicated the environment is, especially when you add newly-licensed teen drivers and their passengers to the mix. I also know all too well what a shattering event it is to lose a child. Education and enforcement are key ingredients, but strong, effective teen driving laws are the first important step toward preventing crashes and saving lives.

Do we do enough to save every life? Probably not, but we have a forceful responsibility to do what we can. And a federal law setting strong minimum standards for states' teen driving laws can save lives.

We must become more focused on the problem as a nation. I am here today to express strong support for passage of the STANDUP Act and to support the Saferoads4teens Coalition. Our enforcement jobs will be much more effective when we know that every state has the same minimum requirements for beginning teen drivers.

Several times in my career I have had to be the one to inform a mother or father that their child would no longer be coming home. You can imagine that I never thought I would be at the receiving end of such a call. I believe that the more we do to improve the system overall, the fewer calls to parents will have to be made. I am urging Congress to help prevent these tragic calls – the calls I never want to make and never thought I would receive – by passing H.R. 1895, the STANDUP Act.