

Annual Report Finds Most States Lack Crucial Highway Safety Laws

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety Calls for Action by State Legislatures as 2020 Sessions Commence New Public Opinion Poll Finds Widespread Concern about Distracted Driving and Drug-Impaired Driving

WASHINGTON ([PRWEB](#)) January 23, 2020 -- Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates) today released the 17th edition of the annual Roadmap of State Highway Safety Laws (Report), finding 395 proven countermeasures which could be saving lives have not been enacted. The Report, [“A 2020 Vision for Safety.”](#) provides a “report card” on 16 traffic safety laws for each state and Washington, D.C. Opportunity exists in every state to enact laws that combat the widely acknowledged public health crisis of motor vehicle crashes.

At a press conference unveiling the Report, Advocates’ President Cathy Chase said, “With the start of a new decade, our clear vision is to eradicate the horrific death and injury toll occurring on our roadways. Every day, approximately 100 people are killed and nearly 7,500 more are injured in motor vehicle crashes. The emotional devastation inflicted on families from crashes also comes with a significant annual economic cost of \$242 billion. This results in each person living in the U.S. essentially paying a “crash tax” of a \$784 every year. The status quo is unacceptable. As state legislatures around the country convene, now is the time for attention, activism and action.”

Advocates’ Report gives every state and Washington, D.C. a [rating](#) in five categories (Occupant Protection, Child Passenger Safety, Teen Driving, Impaired Driving, and Distracted Driving) as well as an overall grade of: Green (Good); Yellow (Caution); and Red (Danger). Seven states (RI, WA, DE, ME, OR, CA, LA) and Washington, D.C. received green ratings with Rhode Island topping the list at 13 enacted laws. Thirty-one (31) others received a yellow rating indicating the need for improvement. Twelve (12) states earned a red rating for lagging dangerously behind in the adoption of Advocates’ recommended laws (SD, WY, MO, MT, AZ, OH, FL, NE, NV, NH, VT, VA). South Dakota has the fewest number of optimal laws at just two total.

Advocates’ President Cathy Chase also revealed the results of a new public opinion poll conducted by ENGINE’S CARAVAN SURVEY, finding a high degree of concern about distracted driving and drug-impaired driving. When asked if states should pass laws prohibiting distracting activities such as watching movies or playing video games, the support for doing so was consistent and clear at 90 percent. Anti-distracted driving advocate Jennifer Weaver reflected on the public’s sentiment saying, “At a time when multitasking and cell phone addiction have become the norm, no one thinks they will be the one to cause a distracted driving crash or even a fatality. No one gets into their car thinking, ‘I am going to answer a call or read a text while driving and kill someone as a consequence.’ However, I am here to tell you that it can happen to anyone and all it takes is a split-second decision to take your eyes off the road.”

Lee Fanshaw, Federal Government Affairs Director of American Family Insurance and Insurance Co-Chair of Advocates’ Board of Directors commented on the drug-impaired driving response. “As Advocates’ newly released public opinion poll demonstrates, more than three quarters of respondents are concerned about impaired driving caused by marijuana use,” Fanshaw said. “We must better understand the full scope of the threat drug-impaired driving poses on our roads in order to take effective action.” He also discussed critical gaps in state highway safety laws. “With nearly half of all crash fatalities involving a motorist who was not buckled up, still 31 states are missing an optimal seat belt law protecting all vehicle occupants in all seating positions. Protecting children in age- and size-appropriate child safety seats in the rear seat is a proven

lifesaver. Unfortunately, 43 states have not enacted both optimal rear-facing until 2 or longer and booster seat components.”

A special section of this year’s [Report](#), “2020 Vision: Issues in Focus,” details areas where technological advances could be saving lives today. “We are at a transformational time in transportation innovation with the availability of safety technologies in vehicles to prevent or mitigate crashes,” said Dr. Deanna Wathington, Executive Dean of Health Sciences at Bethune-Cookman University and Executive Board Vice Chair of the American Public Health Association (APHA). “Systems such as automatic emergency braking (AEB), blind spot detection (BSD) and lane departure warning (LDW) have all been proven to significantly reduce crashes; however, they are often only available through luxury add-on packages or in high-end vehicles which many consumers cannot afford. Additionally, there are no minimum performance standards for them, so each one performs differently which can be confusing and hazardous to motorists and everyone sharing the roads with them.”

Oro Valley, Arizona Police Commander Chris Olson shared his involvement with being on the front lines of traffic safety for nearly 30 years. “I have experienced far too many tragedies on roads and highways that could and should have been prevented. Common crash causes including speeding, impairment and distraction afflict our streets and too often result in a needless loss of life or debilitating injury,” Olson said. “As a law enforcement officer, my top priority is to protect and serve those in my community. This includes educating citizens on unsafe driving practices, ensuring compliance with traffic safety laws, and responding to crashes when they do occur. However, the ultimate goal is always to stop crashes from happening in the first place.”

Former Emergency Nurses Association President and Advocates’ Board of Directors Consumer Vice Chair Mary Jagim provided her insights, “As a registered nurse with over three decades of experience in emergency nursing, healthcare leadership, public policy and healthcare consulting, I have dedicated my professional life to treating and preventing injuries.” She added, “While ER nurses are on the receiving end of caring for people after they have been injured, often from motor vehicle crashes, we also advocate for prevention. The 16 optimal laws in Advocates’ Roadmap of State Highway Safety Laws are precisely the types of recommendations nurses endorse to help prevent crashes and fatalities from happening or to reduce their severity.”

In 2019, [12 laws were passed](#) in nine states and D.C. that meet the Roadmap Report’s criteria. Among the states making progress were Arizona and Florida enacting all-driver texting bans; Arkansas and Washington D.C. enacting optimal graduated driver licensing (GDL) cell phone bans; Louisiana, Maine, Washington, and Washington, D.C. enacting rear facing through age two or longer child safety seat laws; Maine upgrading its booster seat law; New Mexico passing a child endangerment law; and, New Jersey and Kentucky passing laws requiring ignition interlock devices (IIDs) for all drunk driving offenders.

There are, however, many opportunities in this new decade for improvement:

- Primary Enforcement Seat Belt Laws: 16 states lack an optimal primary enforcement seat belt law for front seat passengers, while 31 states need an optimal primary enforcement seat belt law for rear seat passengers;
- All-Rider Motorcycle Helmet Law: 31 states need an optimal all-rider motorcycle helmet law;
- Rear Facing Through Age Two: 35 states and DC are missing a rear facing through age two child protection law;
- Booster Seats: 34 states and DC need an optimal booster seat law;
- Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) for Teen Drivers: 193 GDL laws need to be adopted to ensure the safety of novice drivers. No state has all six optimal provisions of a GDL law;
- Impaired Driving: 30 important impaired driving laws covering all-offender ignition interlocks, child

endangerment, and open containers are needed;

- All-Driver Text Messaging Restriction: Five states need an optimal all-driver texting ban; and,
- GDL Cell Phone Restriction: 19 states need a GDL cell phone restriction.

The countermeasures detailed in Advocates' Report are supported by research, data and experience and when enacted produce significant reductions in motor vehicle crashes, deaths and injuries. Chase underscored the incentive for the Report during her remarks, "This is a momentous time in transportation history with breakthrough safety innovations entering the marketplace and the promises that autonomous vehicles may offer in the future. We are excited to kick off a new decade and intend our 2020 Vision to provide clarity and inspiration to elected officials about the path to improve road safety for all."

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety is an alliance of consumer, medical, public health, and safety groups and insurance companies and agents working together to make America's roads safer. Advocates' mission is the adoption of federal and state laws, policies and programs that prevent motor vehicle crashes, save lives, reduce injuries, and contain costs.

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