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## **Governor Markell Signs Bills Increasing Penalties for Impaired Drivers**

*Newark* – Surrounded by law enforcement and safety advocates, today Governor Jack A Markell signed two pieces of legislation into law creating tougher penalties for those convicted of Driving Under the Influence (DUI) of alcohol. The first, House Bill 152, sponsored by Representative Bryon Short and Senator Brian Bushweller increases fines for all DUI offenders and in particular fifth and subsequent offenders. In 2008, state and local law enforcement officers made approximately 6,916 arrests. Of those, 5,057 drivers were first-time offenders and 59 drivers had been previously arrested for DUI five or more times.

“The new laws will make Delaware safer by keeping more drunk drivers off our roads,” said Delaware Governor Jack A. Markell. “The stiff penalties we are imposing on these dangerous individuals should make motorists think twice before getting behind the wheel after drinking alcohol. We are sending a clear message today that Delaware will not tolerate drunk driving.”

The law also increases the possibility of jail time for 5<sup>th</sup> and subsequent DUI offenders as well as creates separate felony classes for 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> DUI offenders. Already since January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, an additional 3,213 drivers have been arrested for DUI and 40 of those have been arrested five or more times.

“In the last few months, we have seen a number of drivers charged with their fifth and sixth DUIs in Delaware, which tells us these are people who are not getting the message,” said Rep. Short, lead sponsor of HB 152. “We will continue to develop measures like this aimed at stopping this dangerous behavior.”

“The statistics show that while we’ve made much progress, we still have a long way to go,” said Senator Bushweller. “It is a shame we have to enact laws to prevent this kind of behavior, however until more people realize that driving under the influence is just not acceptable we will what we must to protect innocent citizens from harm on our roadways.”

The second bill signed by Governor Markell, Senate Bill 177, was sponsored by Senate President Pro Tempore Anthony DeLuca and Representative Pete Schwartzkopf. It strengthens penalties for first time DUI

offenders with a BAC of .15 or higher by increasing the period of hard revocation for these individuals, who are mandated to have an Ignition Interlock Device (IID) installed in their vehicle, from 30 to 45 days. It also increases their period of license revocation from three to six months as well as mandates the use of IID for six months for those individuals. Furthermore, it limits the driving authority of IID licensed drivers to work, home, school, alcohol treatment programs and interlock service provider appointments.

“We’re looking to make the roads safer for Delawareans. This is one way to do that that we think will be effective,” said Senator DeLuca.

“This interlock requirement targets people who have a high BAC the first time they are caught drinking and driving, which is important because these are people who are very likely to drink and drive again,” said Rep. Schwartzkopf.

“MADD applauds the efforts of the legislature and Governor Markell in improving the alcohol ignition interlock law in Delaware,” MADD Delaware Program Specialist Nancy Raynor said. A strong alcohol ignition interlock program will prevent the suspended offender from driving and with the action taken today by Governor Markell, Delaware is an important step closer to seeing a steady decline in drunk driving deaths, injuries and arrests."

Impaired driving continues to be a significant problem on Delaware roadways. In 2008, 52 (or 43%) of the 122 traffic deaths on Delaware roads were alcohol-related. Since January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, the deaths of 12 people or 21% of the 57 individuals killed on Delaware roads involved an impaired driver.

“Although we deal with statistics on a daily basis, it is critical to never forget that each one of those numbers represents a person, their families and a life lost. Today’s legislation goes a long way to saving lives and preventing families from having to deal with the worst tragedies imaginable," said Safety and Homeland Security Secretary Lewis Schiliro.

The Office of Highway Safety, a Division of the Department of Safety and Homeland Security launched its 2009 *Checkpoint Strikeforce* DUI prevention campaign over the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend. Over the last two weeks as part of this initiative, officers statewide have arrested 36 individuals for DUI, as well as two others for underage drinking offenses. Four sobriety checkpoints and additional DUI patrols are again scheduled to take place throughout Delaware this weekend.

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