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PennDOT, Pennsylvania State Police, Pennsylvania DUI Association Urge Responsible, Designated Driving Ahead of Labor Day Holiday

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP), and the Pennsylvania DUI Association gathered today with local police agencies and victim’s advocates in the DUI Victims’ Memorial Garden to urge motorists to celebrate responsibly ahead of the Labor Day holiday.

“Crashes involving impaired drivers are entirely preventable,” said PennDOT Secretary Yassmin Gramian. “We are urging motorists to ensure their safety and the safety of others on our roadways by designating a sober driver this Labor Day weekend and every time they drink.”

The event featured victim advocate Kelli Donlen, whose nephew Zachary Gonzalez is memorialized in the DUI Victims’ Memorial Garden. The garden, which was dedicated in October 2003 and is located in front of the Pennsylvania DUI Association’s headquarters in Harrisburg, honors and remembers Pennsylvanians who have been killed in impaired driving crashes. Currently, more than 2,200 people are memorialized in the garden.

According to PennDOT data, in 2020 there were 2,698 crashes resulting in 39 fatalities statewide over the holiday week beginning Friday, September 4 at 6:00 PM and running through Sunday, September 13. Of those numbers, 231 crashes resulting in 12 fatalities were alcohol-related and 104 crashes resulting in three fatalities were drug-related.

Impaired driving enforcement goes beyond checking for alcohol impairment. Law enforcement also work to identify motorists impaired by illegal drugs and prescription medication or some combination of these. Pennsylvania has approximately 225 Drug Recognition Experts (DRE) or specially trained officers who look for impaired drivers and assist in DUI investigations when drug-impaired driving is suspected.

“We honor and remember the lives lost because someone chooses to drive impaired,” said PA DUI Association Executive Director C. Stephen Erni. “Labor Day weekend and every remaining day of the year, the message is clear: Do not drive impaired. Our collective goal is to end the suffering caused by an individual’s choice to drive impaired.”

Over this holiday period, the Pennsylvania State Police and local municipal agencies will conduct impaired driving enforcement details as part of a national impaired driving enforcement and education initiative running through September 6. This effort is funded through PennDOT’s statewide annual distribution of more than \$4.7 million from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for impaired driving enforcement.

During the 2019 Labor Day holiday enforcement period, troopers made 610 DUI arrests and investigated 45 crashes in which alcohol was a factor. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and mitigation efforts that were in place throughout Pennsylvania at the time, statistical information was not collected during the 2020 Labor Day holiday driving period.

“Travelers are reminded this holiday weekend to slow down, buckle up, and don’t drive impaired or distracted,” said Captain Robert Wagner, assistant director of the Bureau of Patrol with the Pennsylvania State Police. “Troopers are trained to look for impaired driving behaviors and consistent with our highway safety mission have a zero-tolerance approach toward driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.”

PennDOT encourages motorists to always plan ahead by either designating a sober driver or arranging for alternate transportation. The public can join the conversation on social media by using #BeSafePA and #DriveSober.

To learn more about PennDOT’s efforts to prevent impaired driving or other safety initiatives, visit www.PennDOT.gov/Safety.

For more information on the Pennsylvania State Police, visit psp.pa.gov.

For more information on the Pennsylvania DUI Association, visit www.padui.org.

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