Maryland Selected for Project Aimed at Reducing Impaired Driving-Related Injuries and Fatalities

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GLEN BURNIE, Md. – The Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration (MDOT MVA) has been selected by the National Governors Association to take part in a Learning Collaborative to strengthen the use of data to fight impaired driving-related injuries and fatalities. As part of the initiative, a core team of advisers from several Maryland agencies will learn from national experts and study other states' efforts to improve educational programs, technology, legislation, laboratory testing and training to improve traffic safety.

"Eliminating crashes involving alcohol or drugs has been a priority for my administration and for traffic safety professionals throughout the state," said Governor Larry Hogan. "This Learning Collaborative will help Maryland implement evidence-based programs and practices to reduce impaired driving."

From 2014 to 2018, Maryland averaged 6,779 crashes, 3,190 injuries and 159 fatalities annually related to impaired driving – accounting for 31 percent of the state's total roadway fatalities. Additionally, heroin and opioid use in the state increased the burden on Maryland's Drug Recognition Expert Program and police testing lab. Experts agree strong data collection and standardization, including toxicology testing, is needed to fully analyze impaired driving at the state level. In 2016, the National Safety Council examined police reports from 50 states and found none fully captured the necessary data to understand the extent of drug and alcohol impaired driving in their state.

The Learning Collaborative is expected to produce:

• Improvement and expansion of the state's data system to track impaired driving offenders from arrest to adjudication to treatment;

• Increase of timeliness and accessibility of Maryland's crash data through dashboards that will give highway safety partners access to timely, standardized data;

• An analysis of Maryland's impaired driving program to determine needs regarding manpower, training, technology, legislation and regulation;

• Creation of a process to increase judicial acceptance of drug recognition expert evidence in the absence of blood test results; and

• Development of educational programs directed at judiciary, prosecutors and law enforcement.

"The goal is to reduce – and ultimately eliminate – traffic-related injuries and fatalities," said MDOT MVA Administrator Chrissy Nizer, who will serve as Maryland's core team leader in the Learning Collaborative. "Using a data driven approach will allow us to effectively craft strategies to develop impaired driving enforcement and education programs."

Team advisers will include MDOT Transportation Secretary Gregory Slater, Maryland State Police Superintendent Colonel Jerry Jones, Maryland Department of Health Deputy Secretary Fran Phillips, Maryland Secretary of Information Technology Michael Leahy and Rebecca Phipps from the Toxicologist Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

"Quality data analysis is critical to properly identify target groups, adapt and refine countermeasures, and evaluate the effectiveness of implemented strategies," said Administrator Nizer, who also serves as Governor Hogan's Highway Safety Representative.

The Learning Collaborative project is made possible through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In recent years Maryland has made progress in addressing impaired driving through strategies and targets laid out in the state's Strategic Highway Safety Plan. An Impaired Driving Emphasis Area Team – comprised of transportation planning, engineering and operations, public outreach, law enforcement and emergency medical service officials – is responsible for implementing countermeasures to reduce the number and severity of impaired driving crashes. The team also works to improve legislation, technology, education, training and programs.

MDOT MVA provides resources for the public including educational campaigns and other resources. To learn more about the MDOT MVA Highway Safety Office's Zero Deaths campaign, visit zerodeathsmd.com or like and follow @ZeroDeathsMD on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.