



## News Release

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### **FUNDING, TEXTING AND PRIMARY ENFORCEMENT TOP AAA TIDEWATER'S LEGISLATIVE AGENDA**

*Traffic Deaths on the Increase According to NHTSA*

**VIRGINIA BEACH, VA (Friday, January 11, 2013)** – The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in December released estimates that traffic deaths increased by 7.1 percent in the first nine months of 2012 versus the same period the previous year. The estimated rate of deaths also increased, from 1.09 to 1.16 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. In *Virginia*, traffic deaths increased from 572 to 594 in the first nine months of 2012 compared to the same time period in 2011, up nearly 4 percent. “The traffic fatality data is going the wrong way, serving as a reminder that safety gains are not inevitable and that continued legislative action is necessary to help improve safety on our roadways,” said Georjeane Blumling, Vice President of Public Affairs for AAA Tidewater Virginia.

Safety and transportation funding continue to top the legislative efforts of AAA Tidewater Virginia, an advocate for motorists for over 100 years, and this year the funding crisis giant continues to stare down lawmakers as they seek to break a 20 year deadlock to adequately fund Virginia’s infrastructure.

AAA Tidewater Virginia released today its legislative priorities:

**Transportation Funding:** It was over a quarter of a century ago that Virginia had a long-term and sustainable transportation funding mechanism - the gas tax. Today the value of that tax has eroded by more than 50%, while the cost of building new roadways has dramatically increased. Several years from now Virginia will have only enough money for road maintenance. Adequate infrastructure is critical for not only the quality of life for Virginians, but also for the economic vitality of the commonwealth. AAA will push once again this year for additional funds for transportation and for a constitutional amendment to protect these transportation funds. “Providing adequate transportation funding is the responsibility of our elected officials. The critical need for transportation monies, which has faced 20 plus General Assembly sessions in Virginia, is not going away now or ever unless a group of lawmakers can find a way to address it,” said Blumling.

**Penalties for Texting and Driving:** With AAA’s support, Virginia became one of the first dozen states in the nation to ban texting while driving in 2009. The law, while a major step forward, now needs to be strengthened as a driver cannot be pulled over simply for texting and, if convicted for the offense, the punishment is nothing more than a slap on the wrist as Virginia’s current law defines texting while driving as only a minor traffic offense punishable by a maximum fine of \$20. AAA will support making the offense fall under the reckless driving statute.

**Primary Enforcement Regarding Seat Belt Use, Texting While Driving, and the Use of Electronic Devices by Provisional Licensees:** Laws which deter dangerous behavior are much more effective if they are enforceable, according to AAA. In Virginia, wearing a seat belt,

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texting while driving and/or driving while talking on the cell phone as a teen are all actions which are against the law, but for which adult motorists cannot be pulled over by the police. AAA will fight in 2013 to make all of these offenses primary laws, thus hopefully making the roadways safer for all motorists.

**Teen Driver Safety:** Teen drivers are at the greatest risk of all drivers on Virginia roads. Therefore, the safety of these drivers remains a major priority for AAA Tidewater Virginia. Graduated driver licensing (GDL) is one of the most effective means of reducing teen driving deaths. While Virginia's GDL laws are strong, there is room for further improvements involving nighttime and passenger limits, as well as the number of practice hours required. Strong support will be given to effective legislation which deters dangerous behaviors by teens, the most at-risk group of drivers.

**Open Container:** AAA Tidewater Virginia strongly supports a ban on open containers of alcohol in the passenger side of motor vehicles. Such a ban would reduce the negative and deadly impacts of drinking and driving. Virginia is one of seven states without an open container law.

**Driving Under the Influence (DUI):** In 2012, with the help of AAA and other safety organizations, a law was passed that requires a mandatory ignition interlock be installed in a first time DUI offender's vehicle as a condition of a restricted license. While this was a strong step forward, AAA will support mandated ignition interlock devices for *all* convicted drunk drivers.

**Motorcycle Helmets:** AAA Tidewater Virginia opposes efforts to repeal the current mandatory motorcycle helmet law in Virginia. While repeated attempts have been made in the past for such a change, AAA Tidewater Virginia believes that this life-saving measure is an important one which protects Virginians from incurring increased medical expenses for the long-term care of critically injured or un-helmeted riders.

*As part of North America's largest motoring and leisure travel organization, AAA Tidewater Virginia provides its more than 325,000 members with travel, insurance, financial and automotive-related services. Since its founding AAA Tidewater Virginia has been a leader and advocate for the safety and security of all travelers. For more information, visit [AAA.com](http://AAA.com) and follow us on Twitter at [Twitter.com/AAATWnews](https://twitter.com/AAATWnews).*

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