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TESTIMONY OF THOMAS E. BRYER, DIRECTOR

CENTER FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

BEFORE THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

ON HOUSE BILL 2167

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May 21, 1992

The Department was somewhat tentative in its support of the legislation which eventually passed as Act 31 of 1988. Our concerns were related to the linkage between a non-driving violation such as using a false identification card and license suspension. However, any reservations have completely dissolved at this point.

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In the nearly four years since Act 31 passed, we have seen a dramatic and continuous drop in the involvement of underaged drinkers in traffic accidents. For example, from July, 1987 through June, 1991:

- o Total accidents involving underaged drinkers have dropped 35.9% (from 3,937 to 2,525);

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- o the number of people injured has gone down 32.4% (from 4,842 to 3,272);

- o and, the number of people killed in accidents involving underaged drinkers has dropped 34.3% (from 207 to 136).

As you can see by the data one-third less young Pennsylvanians are being injured or killed as a result of underaged drinking than before the passage of Act 31.

One thing that we have learned through the years in our work with traffic safety is that one of a teenager's most valued possessions is a driver's license. The threat of losing that license is an extremely powerful deterrent to any behavior that may lead to a suspension. Since 1988 a total of 103,416 licenses have been suspended by the Department for violations of Act 31. I cannot help but conclude that many times that number of young people have gotten the message, and stayed away from alcohol.

Certainly, the accident statistics indicate that they have definitely been mixing alcohol with driving at a greatly reduced rate.

It is important to note that a court, including those not of record, already possesses the authority to direct the first-time offender to counseling. I strongly urge you to maintain the current period of license suspension as a penalty for violations related either directly or indirectly to underaged drinking. It is important that the current period of suspension be retained to remain an effective deterrent.