

Pennsylvania State Police Testimony
Public Hearing on Drugged Driving
House Judiciary and House Transportation Committees
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Good morning Chairmen Marsico, Petrarca, Taylor and Keller and members of the House Judiciary and Transportation Committees. I am Lieutenant Mark A. Pezzano, Assistant Director of the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP), Policy and Legislative Affairs Office. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss drugged driving in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. I am pleased to be sitting alongside Corporal Scott Davis, the Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) Coordinator for the Pennsylvania State Police, to talk about this important issue.

“Drugged driving” is defined as operating a vehicle while under the influence of a controlled substance, prescription medication, or an over-the-counter drug that impairs an operator’s ability to safely drive. Different drugs have varying effects on a person’s ability to safely operate a vehicle.

Drugged driving is a national epidemic that we believe will continue to increase for years to come. In 2017, the PSP was responsible for making 19,913 Driving Under the Influence (DUI) arrests. This number reflects a 2.1 percent increase in DUI arrests compared to 2016. Over one-third, or 7,131, of the DUI arrests made by Troopers in 2017 were DUI-drug related arrests. This figure represents an increase of 33 percent compared to the total number of DUI-drug arrests in 2016.

According the National Highway Safety Administration, a staggering 10,497 lives were lost to impaired drivers in 2016, and of those, 327 were fatalities recorded in Pennsylvania alone. The cost of impaired driving on society is equally staggering. It is

estimated that impaired driving costs Americans \$132 billion each year. This cost is felt by everyone in the form of higher insurance rates, property damage, medical costs, and most importantly, the tragic loss of loved ones.

For the purpose of DUI enforcement, the definition of a drug is “any substance which when taken into the human body, can impair the ability of the person to operate a vehicle safely.” This definition not only covers substances listed as controlled substances in the Health and Safety Act, but also over-the-counter medications or household items such as gasoline or compressed gas commonly used to clean computer keyboards.

The State Police has partnered with PennDOT in educational campaigns on this issue and we have been working with municipal police and organizations such as the PA DUI Association and the PA District Attorneys Association to train our Troopers and other police officers in the detection of drivers impaired by alcohol or drugs. Training programs such as the Drug Evaluation and Classification Program, Advanced Roadside Impairment Detection Enforcement (ARIDE), Standardized Field Sobriety Testing, Prosecuting the Drugged Driver, and Drug Trends are being offered across the commonwealth. In 2017, we conducted 85 training sessions which resulted in more than 2,000 police officers being better trained in the area of detecting impaired drivers.

The Drug Evaluation and Classification Program (DECP) is vital in combating drug impaired driving. While many individuals are familiar with the effects of alcohol impairment, drug impairment is much more complicated. The DECP program is an

international program overseen by the International Chiefs of Police (IACP) that trains officers to become Drug Recognition Experts (DRE). This program, administered by the PA DUI Association and PSP, provides intensive training to officers and has set standards that will allow those trained DREs to be recognized by the courts as experts. This is vital in the detection and successful prosecution of impaired drivers. Currently in Pennsylvania, there are 169 active DREs across the commonwealth; 95 are assigned to PSP and 74 are municipal officers representing 66 different agencies. In 2017, DREs conducted 1,694 Drug Influence Evaluations in the Commonwealth.

Drug Influence Evaluations are sometimes conducted when the arresting officer requires additional evidence of impairment in order to successfully prosecute a DUI case. The role of the DRE is vital in the DUI detection process, including cases in which a driver may be impaired by drugs. Recent case law has put additional limitations on drawing blood, and in turn, making it more important than ever to have that expert testimony for prosecution in certain cases. Furthermore, a DRE can also be utilized to rule out drug use and identify potential health issues. In 2017, 47 individuals were identified through the utilization of a DRE as suffering from a medical condition and were transported to a medical facility for treatment.

I would like to conclude by saying thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committees on this important subject. We appreciate your steadfast support of law enforcement and our efforts to keep Pennsylvania's highways safe. Corporal Davis and I will be happy to take any questions you may have.