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New Research Reinforces Effectiveness of Speed Cameras

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To: AUTO EDITORS

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 31 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- GHSA strongly supports new research from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) that reinforces the effectiveness of speed cameras in reducing highway speeds. IIHS studied two jurisdictions: Scottsdale, Arizona, and the Washington, D.C. suburb of Montgomery County, Maryland. These two areas have implemented cameras in different ways, but both have seen dramatic impact.

Speeding-related fatalities continue to be a serious highway safety problem, accounting for approximately 13,000 deaths a year—roughly a third of all traffic fatalities. Despite progress in so many other areas of highway safety, as a nation, little success has been shown at addressing the speeding challenge. There is little public recognition of the problem, and, as noted in the GHSA Survey of the States: Speeding, law enforcement faces numerous obstacles enforcing speed limit laws. GHSA's Survey found that jurisdictions believe increased enforcement of speeding-related laws has become very difficult because of uncertainty in highway safety funding and decreased numbers of officers due to retirements, as well as an increased emphasis on homeland security issues.

GHSA commends Scottsdale and Montgomery County for their innovative approach to combat speeding. According to IIHS, in 2006, Scottsdale became the first US locality to demonstrate the effectiveness of fixed speed cameras on a major highway, the busy Loop 101. Prior to the cameras' installation, 15 percent of drivers were driving faster than 75 mph, despite the posted limit of 65 mph. According to the new IIHS study, once the cameras were in place, the number of violators plunged to 1 to 2 percent. Further evidence of the success of the cameras comes for the Scottsdale 101 Program Evaluation which estimates the total number of target crashes (non-peak period crashes) was reduced by about 54 percent.

In Montgomery County, Maryland, speed cameras are being used to enforce limits of 35 mph or less in residential areas and school zones. Since the installation of the cameras, the proportion of vehicles going more than 10 mph faster than the posted limits has fallen by 70 percent. Additionally, speeds have fallen by 39 percent on roads where signs were posted warning of overall enforcement but where cameras were not yet operational.

Much can be learned from the Arizona and Maryland experiences. These programs are being operated consistent with the recommendations outlined in the 2005 Report from the National Forum on Speeding. The Forum Report advocates for speed camera programs when they are in place for safety and not for revenue purposes. Additionally, the Arizona and Maryland cameras are in areas with demonstrated need and public support. To reinforce the safety objectives of both programs, extensive signage and media efforts have been conducted to remind the public that they must slow down or face a ticket. As with programs to combat drunk driving and encourage seat belt use, highly-publicized enforcement is absolutely critical to a successful speeding program.

Unfortunately, only approximately 35 jurisdictions in our country use speed cameras in their enforcement efforts. That number must be greatly increased if we are to make any progress at reducing speed-related fatalities. GHSA looks forward to more jurisdictions implementing speed camera programs and hopes to draw further attention to the speeding issue when we hold our 2008 Annual Meeting in Scottsdale this fall.

The new IIHS report can be viewed at <http://www.iihs.org>.

The GHSA Survey of the States: Speeding and recommendations from the National Forum on Speeding are online at <http://www.ghsa.org>.

The Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) is a nonprofit association representing the highway safety offices of states, territories, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. GHSA provides leadership and representation for the states and territories to improve traffic safety, influence national policy and enhance program management. Its members are appointed by their Governors to administer federal and state highway safety funds and implement state highway safety plans. Contact GHSA at 202-789-0942 or visit <http://www.ghsa.org>.