

Mr. Chair, Senator Udall and other Honorable Members of the Committee:

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on New Mexico's experience with alcohol related motor vehicle crashes.

My name is Dr. Cameron Crandall. I am an emergency physician and an Associate Professor and Vice Chair for Research in the Department of Emergency Medicine at the University of New Mexico. In addition to practicing emergency medicine, I have a longstanding interest and background in injury prevention.

I work at University Hospital in Albuquerque, which is the only Level 1 Trauma Center in New Mexico and, as such, we treat a higher proportion of alcohol-related trauma compared to other New Mexico hospitals. As an emergency physician, I see firsthand the tragic consequences of impaired driving which includes significant suffering, short and long-term disability, and in too many cases, death.

Nationally, we know that there is 1 death every 45 minutes due to a drunk driving crash, or 32 deaths per day. In 2008, there were almost 12,000 people killed in alcohol-related crashes. In the same year in New Mexico, there were 143 alcohol-related crash deaths. This is, however, only a portion of the problem. There were more than 10 times as many individuals, over 1,700 persons who experienced an injury from an alcohol-related crash.

It is important to recognize the contribution that even small amounts of alcohol have in causing impairment. Any level of alcohol in a person's body will reduce attention, task completion, peripheral vision, and reaction times. Impairment begins as soon as alcohol can be detected in the blood. All of these factors add up to an increased risk of injury and death.

In New Mexico, 39% of all fatal crashes involved alcohol. Among crashes involving injuries but no deaths, only 8% involved alcohol. What this means is that the presence of alcohol increases the likelihood that the crash will be fatal.

There are significant economic costs associated with an alcohol-related crash. Each alcohol-related motor vehicle crash fatality costs over \$3 million dollars, with over \$1 million dollars in direct costs and over \$2 million dollars in lost earning potential and quality of life. In New Mexico, we estimate that all of the alcohol-related crashes in 2008 combined had an impact of almost \$1 billion in both direct and indirect costs. On a per capita basis, this translates to \$466 for every person in New Mexico.

Another important consideration is that alcohol-related crashes involve both intoxicated and sober individuals. As such, everyone is only one step away from a potential life-changing experience. Estimates are that 30% of Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash at some time in their lives. This does not mean that these individuals themselves will be drinking; in fact, many of these individuals

will not be drunk; they may simply be injured or killed by someone who is. In New Mexico, 36% of our victims involved in alcohol-related crashes are sober.

Over recent years, we have seen tremendous improvements and reduction in alcohol-related motor vehicle crash injury and death. Alcohol-related motor vehicle crash fatality rates in New Mexico have dropped significantly, from a rate of 11.9 per 100,000 persons in 2002 to 7.2 per 100,000 in 2008, a 39% reduction.

A number of potential factors help explain this reduction in New Mexico, these include:

- 1) public **education** efforts such as the “You drink, You drive, You lose” media campaign,
- 2) innovative **engineering** solutions such as ignition interlock devices,
- 3) active law **enforcement** programs, such as the “100 Days and Nights of Summer” with ‘Superblitzes,’ DWI checkpoints and saturation patrols; and
- 4) **legislative efforts** to curb drinking and driving, such as closure of drive up liquor store windows.

We must continue these efforts and look for new and innovative strategies to further reduce drunk driving. The ROADS SAFE Act (S. 510) co-sponsored by Sen. Tom Udall which will support the development of passive in-vehicle alcohol detection systems is one such innovative strategy. The American College of Emergency

Physicians supports this legislation and I would like to include a letter of support by the College president in support.

New Mexico's commitment to reduce drunk driving has been effective, but more work must be done. No one effort is sufficient. It is the combination of many strategies that will continue to reduce the impact of drunk driving in New Mexico.