

For immediate release
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Jennifer Lopez Crash Highlights Continuing Risk to Children from DUI Drivers

TORRANCE, CA (September 29, 2014) – A crash Saturday in which a car containing stars Jennifer Lopez and her six-year-old twins, and Leah Remini and her ten-year-old daughter, was rear-ended by an alleged drunk driver highlights a little-discussed but constant risk to children on the road.

Lopez, Remini and their children were rear-ended Saturday evening on Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu by a pickup truck. The pickup driver initially stopped but then returned to his truck and drove off. Police apprehended him a short distance away and arrested him on suspicion of hit-and-run and driving under the influence.

Fortunately the children involved in this collision are reported to be unhurt, but that is often not the case in DUI-related crashes, according to Stephanie Tombrello, Executive Director of SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. “Almost 250 kids die on our roads each year in DUI-involved crashes, and many more are injured. Twenty percent of the crashes that kill children involve alcohol. These deaths and injuries are completely preventable. The fact that they continue to happen is a tragedy – and an outrage.”

Despite efforts over many years to target drunk driving, the problem remains substantial. Almost thirty people in the United States die in motor vehicle crashes involving an alcohol-impaired driver each day – amounting to one death every 48 minutes, or over 10,000 people each year. In 2012, 290,000 road-users were injured. Two out of every three people can expect to be

involved in a drunk-driving crash during their lifetime. The annual cost of alcohol-related crashes totals more than \$51 billion. In 2012 29/1 million people admitted to driving under the influence of alcohol. Worryingly, the rate of drunk driving is highest among 21 – 25 year olds.

About half of DUI-crashes involving children follow the pattern of the Lopez crash where a family vehicle is hit by a DUI driver, but in 52% of cases the offending driver is the one driving the children. Children in that situation can be extremely vulnerable, as many DUI drivers also fail to buckle children up.

For Tombrello, the Lopez crash sends a clear message to parents: “The risk of DUI drivers on our roads is ever-present. You never know who’s coming around the next bend, or racing up behind you. Make sure that your kids are ALWAYS buckled up correctly. Parents need to be aware that 9 out of 10 kids currently ride at risk because they aren’t correctly restrained. If you don’t know why it’s recommended that children ride rear-facing until at least 2 years old, why it’s vital that kids riding forward-facing are protected by a tether being attached to their seat, and why most kids need a booster seat until age 8- 12, then you need to find out. Get educated before your child becomes another DUI statistic. And obviously, never, never, never drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs or allow your child to be driven by anyone under the influence.”

Supported by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. is campaigning to reduce the number of children killed or injured in DUI-related incidents by making parents, policy makers, and enforcement agencies aware that impaired drivers are especially dangerous when driving with children. SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. recommends that:

[The media highlight this little-known risk to children, so that parents, policy makers, and enforcement agencies are made more aware of the severity of the risk of impaired driving to children.

- [Parents make sure that their children are correctly restrained at all times. Nine out of ten kids currently ride at risk because their parents are unaware of how to protect them in the car.
- [Enhanced penalties should be faced by DUI drivers who drive with children in the car.
- [Child endangerment charges should be brought against parents who allow their kids to ride with a DUI driver.
- [Civil courts ensure that children are not put at risk by DUI parents through court-mandated visitation rights, and driving with children while impaired be clearly stated as a consideration in custody or visitation decisions.
- [Criminal courts address the issue of impaired driving with children along when sentencing DUI drivers.
- [Parents educate children about how they can protect themselves from impaired drivers, including how to refuse to get into a car with an impaired adult. Parents can teach their children to buckle up and be good role models by wearing their own safety belts so they are less likely to be injured if they are involved in a DUI crash.

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