



LOUISIANA HIGHWAY SAFETY COMMISSION NEWS RELEASE

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GHSA awards grant to Louisiana for impaired driving screening and assessment

For the seventh consecutive year, the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) and the Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility (Responsibility.org) are awarding grants to help states keep Americans safe from alcohol- and drug-impaired drivers. Louisiana is one of four states to receive the 2021 GHSA-Responsibility.org grant award, which provides a portion of the total of \$157,165 to support enhanced identification and assessment of alcohol- and drug-impaired drivers.

“We have an impaired driving problem in Louisiana,” Louisiana Highway Safety Commission Executive Director, Lisa Freeman said. “But, we also have a solution, and that solution is early screening and assessments for mental health and substance use disorders.”

Summer is traditionally a deadly season for impaired driving, and the risks are heightened this year as alcohol delivery services have become available and as bars, restaurants and entertainment venues fully reopen after being closed or limiting capacity for much of 2020. Traffic levels are expected to jump this summer, too, as more workers return to the office and families take road trips. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), traffic deaths rose more than 7% in 2020 to a 13-year high. In a Traffic Records Data Report prepared by the Center for Analytics and Research in Traffic Safety at L.S.U., the cost of motor vehicle crashes involving an impaired driver in Louisiana in 2019 was \$8.87 billion, or \$2,993 per licensed driver.

The GHSA-Responsibility.org grants will help states implement key recommendations in the GHSA report on High-Risk Impaired Drivers (HRID), funded by Responsibility.org and released in December 2019. Louisiana is pleased to announce that a few municipal and state judges will soon have an opportunity to use the Computerized Assessment Referral System (CARS) to identify those impaired drivers who may have a diagnosable disorder and order them to get treatment. CARS is an easy-to-use computer guided interview that includes comprehensive psycho-social and mental health assessment instruments, which when properly administered, produces reports that can inform sentencing and treatment decisions.

“We have many 3rd, 4th, and 5th DWI offenders in our state, each of whom came through our criminal justice system at some point as a 1st or 2nd offender. Unfortunately, 1st and 2nd DWI offenders are not always screened to determine which ones require clinical assessments and may actually need clinical treatment,” said American Bar Association’s Judicial Outreach Liaison for Louisiana, Judge Jules Edwards III (Ret.). “A few judges in Louisiana have recognized this problem and will now have an opportunity to participate in the 2021 Louisiana CARS Pilot Project, which will provide them with the trained screeners they need in order to make Louisiana roads safer.”

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