

Project Title: Drugged Driving in Louisiana - Quantification of its Impact on Public Health and Implications for Legislation, Enforcement and Prosecution

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Project Summary:

Drugged driving has been recognized as an increasing public health issue nationally and internationally. While the number of fatalities in the U.S.A. has been on the decline since 2007 and the percentage of alcohol-related fatal crashes also has declined, the percentage of fatally-injured drivers with known test results testing positive for at least one drug has increased by five percentage points from 28% in 2007 to 33% in 2009 [1]. The National Roadside Survey (NRS) [2] in which oral fluid and/or blood samples were collected from volunteer weekend nighttime drivers for laboratory testing of illegal drugs showed that 12.4% were positive for alcohol, 16.3% were positive for illegal, prescription, or over-the-counter drugs and 20.5% were positive for either alcohol or one or more drug [3]. Of the drivers that tested positive for drugs, 11.3% tested positive for illegal drugs, 3.9% for medications and 1.1% for both illegal drugs and medications. Cannabis (8.6%) was the most common illicit drug used by drivers followed by cocaine (3.9%) and methamphetamine (1.3%). Over the past decade researchers in many countries have studied the problem of drugged driving and the research has been summarized in a number of comprehensive review articles [4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13]. Specifically, it has been shown that college-aged American youths perceive driving after cannabis use as more acceptable than driving after alcohol use [14]. Thus drugged driving is a serious public safety issue and affects the intermodal transportation system specifically and public health in general. To improve the safety of the roads and highways of the United States, the 2010 National Drug Control Strategy released by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) [15] aims at reducing drugged driving by 10% by 2015. There are five strategies that were identified to accomplish this goal [15] two of which will be the focus of this research proposal: (1) encourage states to adopt per se drug driving laws and (2) collect further data on drugged driving. Specifically, the goals of this research are (1) to use Louisiana as a case study in evaluating laws and policies about drugged driving, to identify obstacles to a per se, or zero tolerance (ZT), law for drugged driving and (2) to collect data on drugged driving and analyze its frequency in Louisiana and other states where data is publically available. These two research goals are, however, intertwined with the other ONDCP strategies. For instance, the enforcement of drugged driving laws requires appropriate testing equipment and the implementation of procedures requires training. Therefore, secondary research goals include a review of best practices for drug testing of drugged drivers and the training needed to accomplish the enforcement of drugged driving laws. This proposed research is intended to provide a guide to a comprehensive approach to drugged driving in Louisiana. However, the results of this research will be applicable beyond Louisiana since many of these issues are similar across states.