



## Kentucky Transportation Cabinet

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### **Transportation Cabinet Releases Preliminary 2020 Highway Fatality Count**

*Fatalities up 46 compared to 2019*

**FRANKFORT, Ky. (Feb. 25, 2021)** – Highway fatalities in Kentucky increased last year according to preliminary numbers from the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet’s (KYTC) Office of Highway Safety (KOHS). Initial data indicates there were 778 fatalities in 2020, compared to 732 in 2019 – a five percent increase.

“2020 was a year of devastating loss for Kentuckians, but what makes deaths even harder to accept is when they could have been prevented,” said Gov. Andy Beshear. “These figures are unacceptable to us and they should be unacceptable to every driver – every person -- in our state. We all have to be more vigilant about personal safety and responsibility behind the wheel if we are going to reverse this trend.”

Of the 778 highway fatalities last year in Kentucky, 57.1 percent were not wearing a seat belt and 15.7 percent involved alcohol. Approximately 32 percent involved speeding or aggressive drivers and 19 percent involved driver distraction. Pedestrians and bicyclists accounted for 97 deaths and motorcyclists accounted for 74 deaths.

KYTC Secretary Jim Gray says the number of unrestrained deaths is particularly concerning, increasing by almost 6 percent compared to 2019.

“While numbers are important to identify potential issues and areas of concern, highway safety is not all about numbers – it’s about people,” said Gray. “These are fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers who left loved ones behind. These lives could have possibly been saved with the simple snap of a seat belt.”

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), wearing a seat belt gives motorists the best chance of preventing injury or death if involved in a crash. Properly fastened seat belts contact the strongest parts of the body, such as the chest, hips and shoulders. A seat belt spreads the force of a crash over a wide area of the body, putting less stress on any one part, and allows the body to slow down with the crash, extending the time when the crash forces are felt by the occupant.

“We face a great challenge, and we pledge to continue working with our local, state and federal partners until we reach our goal of zero deaths on Kentucky roadways,” said Gray. “However, we need the public’s help. We’re asking motorists to commit to save driving behaviors when behind the wheel, and everyone – both drivers and passengers – pledge to always buckle up.”

The KOHS is increasing efforts to encourage safe driving habits through localized media campaigns and partnerships, like *Buckle Up Phone Down* and *Click It or Ticket*, law enforcement blitzes, and federal grant allocations to state and local highway safety-related agencies.

The Governor’s 2021 Recommended Budget included historic safety investments, including \$3 million to implement the Strategic Highway Safety Plan in a bold effort to save lives related to six emphasis areas: Aggressive Driving, Distracted Driving, Impaired Driving, Occupant Protection (seat belts and child seats), Roadway Departure and Vulnerable Road User (motorcyclists, pedestrians and bicyclists).

The fatality figures will remain preliminary until all highway crash data is collected. A final report will be released in April.

So far in 2021, preliminary numbers indicate there have been 79 roadway deaths, down 5 compared to the same time last year.

**Historical Kentucky highway fatality statistics:**

|             |                  |
|-------------|------------------|
| <b>2000</b> | 823              |
| <b>2001</b> | 843              |
| <b>2002</b> | 915              |
| <b>2003</b> | 931              |
| <b>2004</b> | 964              |
| <b>2005</b> | 985              |
| <b>2006</b> | 913              |
| <b>2007</b> | 864              |
| <b>2008</b> | 826              |
| <b>2009</b> | 791              |
| <b>2010</b> | 760              |
| <b>2011</b> | 721              |
| <b>2012</b> | 746              |
| <b>2013</b> | 638              |
| <b>2014</b> | 672              |
| <b>2015</b> | 761              |
| <b>2016</b> | 834              |
| <b>2017</b> | 782              |
| <b>2018</b> | 724              |
| <b>2019</b> | 732              |
| <b>2020</b> | 778* preliminary |

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SOCIAL MEDIA GRAPHIC:

