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December 16, 2002

**To: The Honourable Martin Cauchon
Minister of Justice**

Re: The legal Alcohol Limit in the Criminal Code of Canada

Dear Minister Cauchon,

I am writing to inform you that the Ontario Public Health Association strongly recommends that the Government of Canada should take the important step of lowering the legal alcohol limit for driving in the Criminal Code of Canada to 50 mg%. In doing so we are supporting the position of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, as expressed in its recent Position Paper and Best Advice Paper on Reducing the Harms of Alcohol-Related Collisions. These papers are attached to this letter.

Drinking-driving is a major public health problem in Canada. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health estimates that, between 1977 and 1996, over 35,000 Canadian lives were lost needlessly as a result of drunk driving. Even though the provinces of Canada have implemented important new initiatives in recent years, the drinking driving problem remains a leading cause of needless premature death and injuries in this country.

Sound scientific evidence clearly indicates that driving abilities are significantly impaired at a Blood Alcohol Level (BAL) of 50 mg% and below, and that collision risks are significantly elevated at a BAL of 50 mg%. As well, experiences in other countries demonstrate the benefits, in terms of reduced collisions, injuries and deaths, of a 50 mg% legal limit. Researchers at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health have estimated, based on the experiences of other countries, that a 50 mg% legal limit in Canada could have prevented between 185 and 555 deaths on Canadian roads in 1996 alone. It has been argued that a lowered legal limit will not affect individuals at higher BAC levels, who have the greatest increases in risk of collision. However, this statement runs completely contrary to the available scientific evidence. Of all measures that have been evaluated to reduce drunk driving,

the only one that has been demonstrated to reduce the apparent numbers of high BAC drivers in the population is a reduced legal limit. This evidence is summarized in the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health [Position Paper](#) and [Best Advice Paper on Reducing the Harms of Alcohol-Related Collisions](#).

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) , founded in 1949, represents the collective voice of approximately 3000 individuals in public and community health throughout Ontario. OPHA represents a wide range of sectors and disciplines, who have an interest in improving the health of the people of Ontario.

In summary, on behalf of the membership of the Ontario Public Health Association I strongly encourage you to take action to lower the legal limit for driving in the Criminal Code of Canada to 50 mg%. The need for action on this issue is great, and the likelihood of reducing needless deaths and injuries is great as well.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Jack Lee,
Executive Director