Voters support sanctions on drunk drivers

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If the Legislature decides to write tougher laws to punish drunken driving, it will have the solid support of East Baton Rouge Parish voters, according to findings of the Sunday Advocate poll.

Parish voters overwhelmingly believe drinking and driving is a serious problem, and a majority support a mandatory stay in jail for the first-time offender, the poll showed.

A total of 460 persons were polled on drinking and driving and, overall, 96 percent of the sample, which included white and non-white, male and female, young and old, said it is a serious problem.

Driving under the influence of intoxicating beverages has become a nationally publicized issue, primarily through the efforts of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and other such groups.

These groups, whose members frequently are victim of drunken driving, have called for tougher laws and tougher enforcement of them.

Gov. Treen has joined the call for a crackdown on drunken drivers. He appointed a special task force to study drinking and driving. The governor said he will ask the Legislature, now in session, to ban drivers and their passengers from drinking alcoholic beverages on the road.

"We are going to crack down and get tough with drunk drivers, with jail sentences," Treen told a convention of editors and publishers recently.

A point in his proposed new legislation will include a mandatory two-day jail term or 48 hours of public service on first conviction of driving while intoxicated.

Two days in jail drew majority support among persons surveyed for the Sunday Advocate poll. (Persons were not asked about requiring performance of public service).

Sixty-nine percent of those surveyed supported a 48-hour jail term as a required part of the punishment on first conviction of drunken driving.

A jail term is not now mandatory on the first conviction of driving while intoxicated. The required penalty is a fine, and in addition, the judge may impose a jail term or require a person to take treatment for his or her drinking.

The inclination toward a mandatory jail term was consistent with the overwhelming feeling that drunken driving is not just a problem but a serious problem. It also may reflect the sentiment, expressed by a majority in the poll, that judges are too easy on the accused.

"Nearly three of four voters surveyed in this month's poll feel judges are too soft on those convicted of DWI," said (See *POLL, Page 10-A).

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Poll

Roy Brady of Brady & Associates, which conducted the poll by telephone last Thursday evening. "The implication is that judges should hand out stiffer sentences. 74 percent of the respondents feel that when judges sentence such persons they are too easy. An additional 20 percent feel that judges hand out appropriate sentences, while only 1 percent feel judges are too hard.

Though no category of voters in the poll was "soft" on drinking and driving, men and the younger people were less strong in their feelings about it as a problem, and the two categories were a little easier on the judges.

While at least 90 percent of each group studies feel drunk drivers are a serious problem, they are seen as a slightly less serious problem among younger voters, especially males, and voters living in Ward 1," Brady said.

"Males are somewhat less likely to believe judges are too easy on those convicted of driving while intoxicated," Brady said. "They are more likely to feel judges hand out appropriate sentences. In addition, voters in Ward 1 are slightly less likely than voters in Ward 2 or Ward 3 to feel that judges are too easy on these individuals.

The survey also found that 8 percent of those surveyed, or one person in 12, have lost a member of their immediate family in an alcohol-related traffic accident. It found that 10 percent have themselves been involved in an alcohol-related traffic accident.