

Legislative History for Connecticut Act

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Bill Number:	5748	
Senate Pages:	1664-1719	56
House Pages:	1217-1316	100
Committee:	Transportation: 899-926, 939-961, 1069-1071, 1080, 1173-1187, 1207-1222, 1420-1431	98

Page Total: 254

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jmk

242

Senate

April 16, 2008

for Consent. Any objection to placing this item on
Consent? Seeing none, so ordered.

THE CHAIR [Senator Gaffey of the 13th in the Chair]:

Senator Looney.

SEN. LOONEY:

Yes, Mr. President, thank you. Mr. President,
for a change of marking, on Calendar Page 11, Calendar
338, Senate Bill 442, if that bill might be marked
Passed, retaining its place on the Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Seeing no objection, so ordered, Sir.

SEN. LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

Moving to Calendar Page 15, Calendar 371, Files
469 and 581, Substitute for House Bill 5748, An Act
Concerning Teenage Drivers, as amended by House

jmk

243

Senate

April 16, 2008

Amendment Schedule "A", Favorable Report of the
Committee on Transportation and Judiciary.

THE CHAIR:

Senator DeFronzo.

SEN. DEFRONZO:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I move
acceptance of the Joint Committee's Favorable Report
and passage of the bill in concurrence with the House.

THE CHAIR:

The question is on acceptance and passage of the
bill in concurrence with the House. Will you remark,
Sir?

SEN. DEFRONZO:

Thank you, Mr. President, I will. Mr. President,
I'm happy to bring this bill before the State Senate
today.

And in doing so, I want to acknowledge the
leadership of Governor Rell, who has made passage of
this bill one of her foremost priorities in this

jmk

244

Senate

April 16, 2008

session, as has Senate President Don Williams, as part of our package in the Legislature.

Also want to acknowledge the work of Commissioner Ward, who has devoted great time and effort to the passage of this bill.

I also want to acknowledge, with great appreciation, the Governor's Teen Driving Taskforce, who have tirelessly contributed their advice and direction and research to our efforts.

And I also want to acknowledge Representative Tony Guerrera in the House of Representatives, Representative Fox, who was instrumental in helping us get the bill through the Judiciary Committee, and Representative Mazurek, who has contributed greatly to this bill also.

Mr. President, according to the statistics from our State Department of Health, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death and injury among teenagers in the State of Connecticut, and they

jmk

245

Senate

April 16, 2008

account for 39% of all deaths among 16- and 17-year-olds in our state.

A 16- and 17-year-old is 1½ times more likely to die in a crash than even an 18-year-old and twice as more likely to die in a car accident than an individual in the age category of 35 to 49.

So, Mr. President, this bill attempts to attack this problem in several ways. It strengthens the training requirements by increasing behind the wheel instruction time from 20 hours to 40 hours.

It authorizes the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles to require successful completion of a more comprehensive driver's test prior to even obtaining a permit.

It authorizes the Commissioner to establish, for the first time, specific driver training requirements for behind the wheel instruction, for example, requiring a certain number of hours of nighttime driving or bad weather driving.

jmk

246

Senate

April 16, 2008

And it requires, for the first time, direct parental involvement in safe driving instruction courses.

The bill also strengthens the passenger restrictions for holders of learners' permits and extends the passenger restrictions for new drivers from six months to a year.

And it dials back the driving curfew from 12:00 midnight to 11:00 p.m. and establishes a requirement that all passengers in a car driven by an 18-year-old or younger is required to wear seatbelts.

Mr. President, the bill also establishes a stronger series of suspensions related to young drivers who violate certain laws, including a 30-day suspension for those who violate the graduated driver's licenses requirements.

Those include violations such as curfew violations or passenger restrictions, a minimum 12-month suspension for a first-time DUI offense,

mandatory license suspension for 16- and 17-year-old drivers who violate certain serious traffic laws, including speeding, reckless driving, racing, or the use of a cell phone.

And, Mr. President, there's also strengthened capacity for law enforcement, providing for a summary suspension, 48-hour suspension, and seizure of motor vehicles for such violations, and procedures for the return of the vehicles, obviously.

And finally, Mr. President, the bill excludes commission of certain serious motor vehicle crimes from protection under the Youthful Offender Statute, thereby ensuring that the Commissioner will have the information needed to administer the motor vehicle laws in terms of applying sanctions and suspensions where necessary.

Mr. President, this is intended to be a very comprehensive bill. And as I indicated, it's the culmination of a lot of good work on the part of a lot

Senate

April 16, 2008

of interested people, and I urge its passage. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator DeFronzo for that summary of this bill. Will you remark further? Senator Nickerson.

SEN. NICKERSON:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, this bill stands on a very firm foundation as to why we got here and how we got here.

The why is exactly as Senator DeFronzo has said. The statistics are crystal clear in that the driving population comprising of those who are 16- and 17-year-olds is involved in collisions, fatalities, and injuries in a proportion far larger than their proportion of the population. That's a fact.

And legislation should begin with the fact, and it does begin with that fact. The how we got here is also important. We got here because a couple of years

jmk

248

Senate

April 16, 2008

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Senate

April 16, 2008

ago, we created a graduated license system in Connecticut.

And we said in Connecticut, there are going to be three categories of people, differentiated by age, as regards driving. Those who are under 16 may not drive. Those who are over 18 may drive without restriction.

Those who are between those two ages, are 16 and 17, will have restrictions placed on how they can drive in order to create a transition so that they learn responsibility, they gain maturity, and, above all, they gain experience.

Operating a motor vehicle is just as dangerous, maybe more dangerous, than operating a, say, dangerous factory equipment. We wouldn't think of letting someone, their first of work, operate that equipment.

So we had the graduated driving license law. It has worked well. This bill stands directly in the line of descent from that bill.

jmk

250

Senate

April 16, 2008

Most of what it does, not all of it, but most of what it does is simply an extension of what the graduated license bill of a couple of years ago does, specifically with regard to the curfew. It extends the curfew, but we already have one.

It increases the time period during which a driver of teenage years may not have peers as their passenger. We already have that restriction. It simply extends it.

Certainly, no one can quarrel with the severe sanctions that are imposed for a variety of violations, DUI and others. And we always have, we have long had a driver training school requirement hours. This increases those hours.

So much of the bill is simply a logical outgrowth and an extension of where we already are. There is one new provision that's worthy of mention, and that is, for the first time, we require parents to have a two-hour driver training session.

jmk

251

Senate

April 16, 2008

Why do we do that? We could say of parents, well, they're already licensed drivers. They're familiar with the rules of the road. We do that so they are familiar with these rules, the driver limitation rules on teenagers.

Why do we do that? Because we want enforcement to be as much an involvement of the parents as it is law enforcement officers.

Certainly, law enforcement officers will have the right to enforce this law, and we expect them to. But the practicalities of life are, and the realities of life are, we want the parents to be aware of these laws so that they can encourage, maybe demand that their children abide by them.

So in summary, there's a good reason why we're here. There are very solid reasons how we got here. I thank the Chairman for bringing it out, and I will strongly support this bill and urge its adoption. Thank you, Mr. President.

jmk

252

Senate

April 16, 2008

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator. Senator Freedman.

SEN. FREEDMAN:

Thank you, Mr. President. A question through you to the proponent of the legislation.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed, Ma'am.

SEN. FREEDMAN:

I believe the Teenage Driving Taskforce has not completed its work, through you to the Chair of the Transportation Committee?

THE CHAIR:

Senator DeFronzo.

SEN. DEFRONZO:

Through you, Mr. President, that is correct.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Freedman.

SEN. FREEDMAN:

jmk

253

Senate

April 16, 2008

Again, through you, will we be anticipating more recommendations then coming forward from that commission?

THE CHAIR:

Senator DeFronzo.

SEN. DEFRONZO:

Through you, Mr. President, the taskforce has really broken its work into two phases, as I understand it, those proposals which we could adopt this session, which are fairly immediate in nature, and then longer term recommendations.

So I am fully expectant that we will have more recommendations when we come back next year, through you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Sir. Senator Freedman.

SEN. FREEDMAN:

jmk

254

Senate

April 16, 2008

Thank you, Mr. President. I appreciate his comments, and I look forward to what comes to us in the future.

I would just like to comment on the two-hour session for the parents when it comes to driver's education because I've heard from a lot of constituents that this is a terrible thing.

You're going to force parents into doing things that they don't want to do. And yet, I sent out a postcard to the people I thought would have new drivers in their family.

And on that postcard, I listed the things that we now require of our new drivers, no talking on the cell phone, all of those little things. I had a parent thank me for that, who said, I had no idea these restrictions existed.

And that just reinforced to me the necessity of requiring the parents to be part of that, even if it's

jmk

255

Senate

April 16, 2008

a short period of time, because I do believe they need to know what we expect of these young drivers.

And if they don't know, they won't be able to enforce it at home. So I look forward to voting for this tonight, and I hope my constituents understand we're trying to prevent future tragedies, and we want parents to be part and parcel of the bargain we make when we allow a 16-year-old to get a license, because driving really is a privilege. So thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Madam. Will you remark further?
Senator Kissel [inaudible] Senator Kissel, you have the floor.

SEN. KISSEL:

Thank you very much, Mr. President. Great to see you up there. I'd like to commend Senator DeFronzo and Senator Nickerson and everyone else who's worked on this and, quite clearly, Governor Rell.

jmk

256

Senate

April 16, 2008

I have a 12-year-old, Nathaniel. I have a four-year-old son, Tristan. And I cannot imagine any more horrific tragedy than to receive a call at some point in the future saying something has happened to one of my boys.

The times when my youngsters are going to be wanting to try to learn to drive are a few years away, and I sort of thank God for that. I don't know if I'm really ready.

Just the notion that Nathaniel is going to be a teenager, come the end of September, is pretty incredible. I guess time flies when you're having fun.

But let me just say this. First of all, in the last month or so, I've had the wonderful opportunity to work, or actually to be in the presence of a couple of moms, involved in a group called Impact, and they've suffered horrific tragedy in the loss of their children.

jmk

257

Senate

April 16, 2008

I believe that some of those folks are on the Governor's Teen Driving Taskforce. And I commend them for turning what is a horrific tragedy in their lives into something very, very positive.

And we had an opportunity to go, and they spoke to seniors, juniors, and sophomores in Suffield High School.

And I'll tell you, you just can feel it in the back of your throat when you hear, point by point, minute by minute, what takes place when a mom or a dad finds out that they've lost someone that they love.

Also though, I'd like to raise the notion that in the last couple of years, in serving on a variety of taskforces that have addressed the issue of juvenile jurisdiction, it was brought very clear to us that the growth and the maturity of the human brain does not take place in the teen years.

And in fact, if you really want to get verification of that, go to any, we're in the

jmk

258

Senate

April 16, 2008

insurance capital of the United States. We used to be, I'd like to believe that we still are.

Go to any actuary in any insurance company and find out when their rates level off for automobile insurance, okay. It's not in the teen years. It's not even in the early 20's. It's around the mid 20's.

They're the folks that know. They write the policies. They know when an individual is mature enough to drive fairly safely on our roads.

And in some of the presentations that were brought home to us by a professor from Dartmouth College up there in Hanover, New Hampshire, they came down, she was nice enough, it actually demonstrably showed that young people do not appreciate risk, such that adults should appreciate risk.

And they did tests. You know, there's a pool of sharks. You ask a teenager, should you jump into the pool of sharks? They'll say, well, depends if they're

jmk

259

Senate

April 16, 2008

hungry. Well, that's not really the correct answer, is it?

That's a dangerous place to go, no matter if they're hungry or not. But they don't appreciate that. And in fact, to some extent, you know, there's that exhilaration. There's that freedom.

It all comes together in those teen years, when all of a sudden, you're in the middle of a ton and a half of metal, and you're outside of home, and Mom and Dad aren't with you.

Well, if we can do anything to try to protect the lives of our young ones, through that formative period in their lives, then I think it's worthwhile.

And to the point that Senator Freedman raised, and I think it was spot on, you know what, a couple of hours for parents to know what is expected of their young people I don't think is asking too much.

jmk

260

Senate

April 16, 2008

I will grant you that there's going to be some of my constituents that will disagree with me on this particular measure.

But when you look at how many parents think nothing of going to their children's sports practices, their dance practices, bringing them to work, bringing them back from work, all the other things that are so important in a young person's life, to take two hours to figure out what the laws of the land are regarding driving here in the State of Connecticut, when it has changed quite a bit.

To just think that it is the way that it was when we were young, it has changed dramatically. So I'm willing to take that chance. I'm willing to go up to any of my constituents and say, yeah, maybe you look at it as a little bit of a pain.

Maybe it will be difficult to go and find the time. Maybe there's some costs associated with it. But if you've gone to an after-school meeting with

jmk

261

Senate

April 16, 2008

your son or daughter's teacher, if you've brought them somewhere, if you've spent two hours just taking them to the movies and done something fun with them, what's wrong with a couple of hours in a classroom, where you find out what their rights and responsibilities are?

And if that will help you to be able to communicate to them, to talk to them reasonably and rationally, this is what the State of Connecticut expects of you, Son or Daughter, and this is what your mom and I expect of you, Son or Daughter.

And we're going to be watching, and we're going to be monitoring, because it's not that we don't trust you, but it's that we just want you home safe and sound at the end of the day, because we love you that much.

I believe, I may be off, but I think tomorrow, the Governor wanted moms and dads to talk to their children about teen driving, April 17. How poignant

jmk

262

Senate

April 16, 2008

and how perfect that we are able to pass this bill out of this Chamber tonight?

Maybe she'll even sign it tomorrow, who knows? Has it gone through the House? It has indeed gone through the House.

So I guess I look at all of this, not necessarily as meddlesome government, but I look at all of this from a perspective of there's a group of folks out there that we have heretofore in our law, in so many ways, looked at in terms of you're a child, and then, boom, we're just going to cut you loose, and you're an adult.

And I think that over the last several of years, we've come to the conclusion that that doesn't match the biology. That doesn't match the sociology. That doesn't match the psychology.

And that really doesn't match the reality of what it's like to be a teenager in the State of Connecticut. And for those reasons, I stand in strong

jmk

263

Senate

April 16, 2008

support of this bill. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

I thank you, Senator Kissel. The question is on passage in concurrence with the House. Senator Fasano, you have the floor, Sir.

SEN. FASANO:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, first of all, I do want to thank Senator DeFronzo, Senator Nickerson, and Governor Rell, in particular, for bringing this forward.

I have three children, two of which are driving, both of which, the oldest two were subject to our new laws, and they lobbied me hard to vote against those.

I now have a 14-year-old whose only amendment was that if, Dad, you have to go to class, you can't sit next to me. So I was going to draft that amendment, but I decided not to.

jmk

264

Senate

April 16, 2008

But the thing is is that this is not going to be the silver bullet. You know, parents, most of us know our kids, and we know their responsibilities. We know what they can do and what they can't do, and we feel comfortable.

And we feel a lot of pressure because recently, we've had so many instances of fatalities with teenager drivers, for one reason or another, some of which were in violation of the laws we had on our books at the time, some of which were just inexperience, and those are always very tragic.

The difficult issue that I face is how far are we going to go to place a bubble around our kids? And how far are we going to go to say, as a parent, we're going to let you know what the qualifications are for your children?

We can argue about whether 11:00 is reasonable or not. We can argue whether or not 12:00 was reasonable or not. We can argue some of these items in this

jmk

265

Senate

April 16, 2008

bill, and that's the difficult point I have as a parent.

I know my son, who's 17, his curfew is midnight. But if he comes home 20 after 12:00, I'd rather have him home at 20 after 12:00 than midnight if he's going to rush to get home. If he's going to speed to come home, come home at 12:20.

When you have a bill that says 11:00, it's a little early, I believe, for 17-year-olds, if we're going to talk about reality. But I guess those are nuances of the bill that perhaps we can visit at another time and get the majority of this bill passed.

I think it's done with the best intentions and the right policy. However, I think we have to be cautious that we don't go too far as a Legislature, put bubbles around certain things that we just can't control, and let parents be parents.

So I'm going to support this measure for today because I know a lot of people worked really hard, and

jmk

266

Senate

April 16, 2008

I know Governor Rell, this policy is something she believes strongly in in her heart, as so do the Members of the Committee that passed this.

And I'm going to support it for the reasons. I'll look forward perhaps next year, bringing back some amendment that may look at some of these items because, you know, look, I asked my kids to ask their friends, how many of you or your friends were ever pulled over by a police officer because you had too many kids in the car?

And let's say they were 17 years old and could have kids in the car. You can't tell if the driver is 17 or 16 merely by looking at them. And the police don't pull people over for that. And I understand why. And that makes sense to me.

I don't see the police officers pulling over kids time after time to guess their age, to see if they're in compliance with the bill. So I don't really see the enforcement being there in real terms.

jmk

267

Senate

April 16, 2008

It doesn't mean it's not a bad bill. It doesn't mean we shouldn't go forward, because as a Legislature and a state, we need to set a policy that we need to let people know we care, we listen, and we hear.

So in bulk, this is good. It's got a lot of great, great provisions, and I support it for that reason.

And I'm hoping that maybe next year, we can revisit it, tailor it a little bit, and make it a little better bill. So with that, Mr. President, I'm going to support this measure. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator. Senator Caligiuri, you have the floor next, Sir.

SEN. CALIGIURI:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I rise in support of this bill. We have a serious problem in Connecticut, not unlike other states, and that is that our teen drivers are getting into accidents, so many

jmk

268

Senate

April 16, 2008

of them fatal, at a rate that exceeds that for any other group or segment of our population of Connecticut.

We have a moral obligation to try to solve that problem. And there are really only two different approaches that we could take. The first is to raise the driving age, and the second is to take the approach that we're taking in this legislation.

That is through increasing educational requirements, training requirements, restrictions, and penalties for individuals who break the rules that are intended to keep them safe.

I believe that this path is a proper one for us to take, and as Senator Nickerson pointed out, it is one that we've taken previously. And I think the improvements we're making are important ones.

I was very proud to join Representative Mazurek in submitting legislation, part of which is reflected in the bill that we have before us today.

jmk

269

Senate

April 16, 2008

We were hit hard in Wolcott, which is one of the towns that I represent, when we lost three teens this summer. And it was evident that we needed to try to do something, however imperfect, to try to keep our teens safer than they are currently.

I understand and acknowledge that enforcement, especially in this area, is an exceedingly difficult thing to do.

But the fact that we have a difficult time enforcing some of these laws does not mean that we cannot do so, and it does not mean that we don't have an obligation to try to the best of our ability to do so.

And I would suggest that a number of the provisions that we've put in this bill, including those that Representative Mazurek and I introduced, would be things that would help law enforcement to better enforce these laws.

jmk

270

Senate

April 16, 2008

The stricter penalties for violating restrictions and other requirements for teen drivers could have, I hope, a deterrent effect on teens from doing some of the things that could result in death or serious harm.

And the fact that a police officer, under this legislation, can seize a teen driver's license for up to 48 hours, right on the spot, if the police officer finds that that teen is in violation of any number of the requirements that they have to abide by, which, again, are designed to keep them safe, will help, I hope, teach these teen drivers a lesson and take off the road, albeit perhaps for a short period of time, individuals who could do a great deal of harm to themselves and to the people who share the roads with them.

And I will just note that that specific provision also requires that that teen cannot get his or her license back until and unless he or she is joined at

jmk

271

Senate

April 16, 2008

the police department by their parent or legal guardian.

It is my hope that by involving parents in that way, in addition to the training requirements that were spoken of earlier, we will continue to give parents a powerful tool to know what's happening with their teens who are driving and to help us enforce these laws.

Is it a perfect bill in the sense that we will have a perfect ability to achieve what we hope to achieve? No, but that's true for most of what we enact.

But nevertheless, we have a moral obligation to pursue this. We have a moral obligation to do everything in our power to help keep teens safer.

I believe that this bill will do that, and for that reason, I'm honored to be supporting it, and I would urge others to do so as well. Thank you, Mr. President.

jmk

272

Senate

April 16, 2008

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator. Would you remark further?

Senator DeBicella.

SEN. DEBICELLA:

Thank you, Mr. President. I rise to support this bill, not to reiterate all the arguments that have been made but actually to relate a personal side of this, which is that I actually was one of these kids.

When I was 16 years old, I myself was driving and was in a major accident. Fortunately, nobody was hurt. The car was totaled, but everybody walked away fine, thank God.

But the issue is, going back to the thing Senator DeFronzo was saying, if you look at the conditions that were happening, I was driving at night, I was speeding, and I had four kids in the car, so all the conditions that we're saying that actually cause accidents were present.

jmk

273

Senate

April 16, 2008

And I tell the story not to talk about my driving prowess when I was 16 but to illustrate that 16-year-olds in general, when they first get that license, and they have that feeling of freedom, are apt to make poor decisions.

We're not going to be able to legislate against that. What we can do is offer education and then enforcement.

And the education components of this bill, both for students and for parents, are going to go a long way towards showing the things that I had to learn the hard way.

And if we're able to stop a few people from doing that, then this is worth it. We won't stop everybody. That's impossible. And the enforcement element of this is important as well because 90% of teen drivers out there are fine.

But it's those 10% who are speeding and who aren't learning from their mistakes that the gradual

jmk

274

Senate

April 16, 2008

upping of the penalties for the first, second, and third offense will be very effective in getting those teens to take this very seriously.

You know, Mr. President, if I could go back in time, I actually wish that these restrictions were in place when I was there. Maybe that accident wouldn't have happened.

And there are many other teens out there who hopefully, they and their parents, will look at this not as onerous government interference with their lives but rather as practical precautions we can take to save the lives of our teens and others on the road. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator. Would you remark further?
Senator Slossberg.

SEN. SLOSSBERG:

Thank you, Mr. President. I rise also in support of this bill. You know, in 2006, 50 people died in

jmk

275

Senate

April 16, 2008

crashes involving teenage drivers. In 2006, the teen injury in crash rate was 39% higher than the rate for 35- to 49-year-olds.

In 2007, the number of teenage driver suspensions and licenses that were temporarily taken away was up to 975. These are all statistics. Sometimes, we hear statistics in this Chamber, and they don't matter. I represent Milford, Orange, and West Haven.

Out of the seven teenagers killed in this state in 2008, five of them were from Milford and Orange. We are a community that is still grieving over this loss.

And true words can't speak to the heavy hearts that exist in the families and the students and everyone who knew these young people.

Their families are still dealing with what could have been, what might have been, what should have been, graduations, proms, all the wonderful things that we look forward to for our young people.

jmk

276

Senate

April 16, 2008

I rise in support of this measure today, even though I know that tougher laws won't stop all unsafe driving by teenagers. But education and more training and tougher penalties will help.

And if we save one life, just one, even if this legislation isn't perfect, then we've done a good thing here today.

As a parent of a soon-to-be driver, I have a 15½-year-old at home, I may be the first person in this Chamber to have to go to that driver's class. And you know what?

It's okay with me because if it means that I'm going to have a better conversation with my son about his driving habits and it means that it's going to increase the likelihood that he's going to be safe, whether he's driving or whether there are other kids driving in the car with me, or he's in someone else's car, I'll take that time.

jmk

277

Senate

April 16, 2008

I'm glad to do it. It's my obligation as a parent, and I'm delighted because all we want to know is that our young people come home safe. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator Slossberg. Would you remark further? Will you remark further? Senator Crisco.

SEN. CRISCO:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, let me associate myself with the remarks by our colleagues in the Circle. It is almost impossible to affect human behavior. And basically, that's our major problem around our teenage drivers.

However, as a Member of this Circle, as Members of the Circle, and as august General Assembly body, we have a responsibility. To not do anything would be extremely irresponsible.

jmk

278

Senate

April 16, 2008

Some years ago, in fact, almost ten years ago, this Circle adopted legislation creating Family Day, which we have been celebrating ever since that time.

And the purpose of Family Day was to bring families together to spend some time together and to talk together because at that time, the lack of family involvement was a major criticism among our society.

This year, which will be our tenth anniversary, I am advocating that our slogan for 2008 and '09 would be that responsibility is a family commitment. Let me repeat that. Responsibility is a family commitment.

And it's not only the teenage drivers, but it's also the parents or guardians who have to share in that responsibility.

And hopefully, with the good work of Senator DeFronzo and the Ranking Members of the Committee, and other Members of the Committee, we will achieve a certain degree of responsibility where we may never measure or never know what this legislation achieves.

jmk

279

Senate

April 16, 2008

But the hope that it will at least save one life, prevent one accident, is something I believe that we could all be very proud of. So responsibility is a family commitment.

And hopefully, with the legislation that we have before us this evening, it will go further in enhancing that responsibility. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator Crisco. Will you remark further? Senator McKinney.

SEN. MCKINNEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, this is clearly an important topic for us to be discussing. As a former Member of the Transportation Committee, was proud to participate in and support our original graduated driver's licensing laws.

And I remember the debates we first had regarding those laws. And what was so impactful and informative

jmk

280

Senate

April 16, 2008

on my thinking was the dramatic statistics about the increased likelihood of getting into an accident depending on the number of people in a car.

And I don't remember the statistics exactly, but if there were four people who were in the car, you were ten times more likely to get in an accident than if there's only one.

And that's why the passenger restrictions, I believe, were a key to that original and our current graduated driver's licensing laws.

I think we're all stunned every time we turn on the news or read the newspaper, to learn that another young person has died in a car accident.

I take the Merritt Parkway to and from Hartford, Connecticut, and there is a sad reminder on my trip home, southbound, of the recent accident where two young people died.

But the driver of that car was also 18 years old too, and I think that points out the fact that whether

jmk

281

Senate

April 16, 2008

you are 16 or 17 or 18 or 19, regardless of the laws that we pass, we will not prevent all reckless driving.

And that is just a sad reality that we will have to learn to deal with. There are some extremely good pieces to this bill. For me, the most important part is increasing the behind-the-wheel instruction to 40 hours.

I don't even know if 40 hours of instruction, quite frankly, is enough. I think the most important aspect to making better drivers is more practice driving.

I also like the fact that we require people under the age of 18 in a car to wear a seatbelt. All people under 18 in a car wear a seatbelt.

Having said that, I wanted to share with my colleagues briefly an experience I had at Fairfield Ludlowe High School.

jmk

282

Senate

April 16, 2008

I wanted to hold a public forum on the issue, brought the proposed bill before the junior and senior classes, over 600 students, had a panel of experts, people from the Governor's taskforce, our police chief, our fire chief, some people from Impact, and other leaders, to talk to these young men and women about this.

And also, more importantly, we spent more than half of our time listening to the students. And what amazed me, and I don't know if anyone else has experienced that, is the lack of connection, the lack of trust that our young people have for us, not just as public officials, maybe just as adults, but specifically as public officials.

I'm 44 years old. I stood up. I kind of would like to think I'm closer to 18 than I am to, you know, 80 or whatever, but, you know, I stood up there in a suit and probably looked foreign to them.

jmk

283

Senate

April 16, 2008

And they expressed a lot of their frustrations to me. And I asked them, I said, look, nobody is getting in trouble here. Don't worry about the fact that the police chief is here, but, you know, how many of you follow our current graduated licensing laws?

And nobody raised their hands. How many of you have, on occasion or a lot, you know, break the restrictions on number of people in the car or the like? Every hand went up.

What does that make you feel like? And they expressed this feeling that they felt like they were being treated like criminals and that police officers looked at them like criminals. I asked them what their bill would look like.

And they said, we believe and we want more time behind the wheel. We think more practice will make us better drivers.

Now they thought that maybe they should get their permit earlier, not that that's going to happen, but

jmk

284

Senate

April 16, 2008

they, almost to a person in that room, said, we should have more time, more practice.

I asked them about what some of their parents thought was controversial, having parental involvement, every hand went up, absolutely.

In fact, some kinds were actually bold enough to stand up and say that some of our parents tell us, bring your younger brother to school, and stories like that.

So parents, maybe not knowing that there are restrictions, even restrictions on immediate family members, were telling them. So these young men and women were saying more time behind the wheel, and get our parents involved.

The other thing they said, and that's not for us, and maybe our local school districts will work on this, as Chairman of the Education Committee, Mr. President, is that they thought this should all be

jmk

285

Senate

April 16, 2008

done in our school system, even in Fairfield, Connecticut, which is a pretty well-off town.

Many people said that their parents were struggling with the costs of the private driving schools and that they would feel more comfortable doing it in the school system.

And I don't know how that would all entail, but they thought that maybe actually having driver's ed and practice time behind the wheel in the school system would be a better environment. That was the good news from the forum.

The bad news from the forum was that there is this continuing disconnect between what is our hope for a solution to too many tragedies and what's really happening with our 16- and 17-year-olds.

You know, the numbers on occupants in a car and accidents are startling, but I don't know if we've ever done a study on looking at who the occupants in those cars that get involved in accidents are.

jmk

286

Senate

April 16, 2008

Are they family members, immediate family members, or are they, you know, as Senator DeBicella recounted, you know, three or four or five buddies or friends from high school in a car, chatting, listening to music, and being distracting, and now, even worse, driving while texting.

Because I'm not sure that it should be wrong for a 17-year-old, who drives to high school, to not be allowed to take their younger brother or sister, drive them to the bus stop or even drive them to school.

And I hear that a lot from parents, as well as these kids. The other thing I asked is I asked them how many kids have a curfew. Almost every hand went up. I asked them if anybody in the room had an 11:00 curfew. One hand went up.

I just don't know that 11:00 represents reality for today's 17- and 16-year-olds. I was having a conversation with Senator DeFronzo earlier, and I think, again, the evidence before the Transportation

jmk

287

Senate

April 16, 2008

Committee is that there is more danger at night than there is during the day.

But at night is not 11:00 or midnight. At night really starts around 7:00, 8:00. So if we're going to talk about the difficult decisions about nighttime restrictions, we ought to focus on where so many of the accidents at night occur, and that's around 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, if we're going to have that type of a restriction.

I don't know that the accidents, the tragedies that we've seen lately, have occurred between 11:00 and 12:00 at night. So I'm concerned that 11:00 doesn't reflect the reality of a 17-year-old's life today.

My last concern is that while I think the enhanced penalties are good, I have concern over whether or not we're going to see enforcement.

Again, the overwhelming experience I had in talking to 16- and 17-year-olds, and talk to some

jmk

288

Senate

April 16, 2008

parents, is that our kids aren't complying with the law.

So whether it's 3 months or 6 months, 6 months or 12 months, if they're not complying with it now, I don't know that they will.

And I have concern over the enforcement provision here. If a police officer, as I read Section 8, pulls over a car, and there are 3 kids in the car, and they're not coming back from work or school or any of the exceptions, and it's after 11:00, the police officer has to suspend that person's license for 48 hours and remove the car.

And now you have three kids left there. And I guess the police officer takes them back to the police station. Now that's a powerful lesson, no doubt. and not too unfair of a punishment.

I don't know if we're going to see the enforcement because of the difficult that that brings.

jmk

289

Senate

April 16, 2008

So I know this bill is going to pass. I am hopeful that it will protect our kids and save lives.

But I am, I just have this urge this evening to say to all of those young people I talked to that we do listen to you up here. You may not agree with our decisions, but we don't take you for granted.

You know, I'll just share one more thing, and maybe Senator Nickerson will find this interesting. When we did the question and answer question at Ludlowe High School, the first young man to ask me a question, and I've known him since he was a kid.

He came up here, lobbying me for juvenile diabetes, so he's been politically active since he was about six years old, and I know his mom. And he asked a question, and I knew it was going to be a tough question.

He said, Senator McKinney, the law requires vision testing for people over age 65 to get their

jmk

290

Senate

April 16, 2008

license, but you guys never implement that law. You keep pushing it off, pushing it off, pushing it off.

And maybe there are people who are in their 70's or 80's or 90's who maybe aren't as good of drivers as they used to be.

And maybe we should be concerned about their ability to drive as much as we are about 16- and 17-year-olds, but you don't do anything about them.

And my, I think honest, I know it was honest, but I think my correct answer was, you know, they lobby. They vote. They march on Hartford. It didn't go over well, but I'm not sure that's inaccurate.

So I feel the urge today to say to them that I think some of us do, I think all of us do listen. I think we need to incorporate some of their reality more in these laws as we review them over time. And that's why tonight, I think you'll see one red light next to my name. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

jmk

291

Senate

April 16, 2008

Thank you, Senator McKinney. Senator Hartley.

SEN. HARTLEY:

Thank you, Mr. President, and good evening to you. Much has been said about this legislation because clearly, it is a difficult task to try to legislate things that sometimes ought to be more innate.

But while Senator Slossberg might be the first parent in this Circle to go through the driver ed training, I probably was the last parent to go through the driver training in its current form.

And I will tell you, we talk often in this Circle about parental involvement and how important it is and what, in fact, a difference it makes.

And given teenagers, knowing their propensities and the fact that they really do know everything, and, as my daughter will tell me, no, that's not me, I really would have loved to have the opportunity to be invited to participate in the driver training process.

jmk

292

Senate

April 16, 2008

And while I tried to get invited, it did not happen. And so I really had no place in the room, although I did visit the room from time to time, very much to the chagrin of my daughter and, quite frankly, all the other teenagers in the room.

And it clearly was my impression that we need to focus on this opportunity because it is the chance to get their attention, because they want these licenses so very desperately.

And I think, quite frankly, like myself, there are a lot of parents out there who would like to be invited, to have the opportunity to participate in this life milestone for their teenagers.

And I understand some parents will think that perhaps it's a bit onerous. But on the whole, I wager that most of the parents out there want to be involved because this is clearly one of those events that is a milestone in everyone's life and in families' lives.

jmk

293

Senate

April 16, 2008

And we want it to be a happy and good outcome. And I think this is a piece of legislation that will help to ensure this. While we can never totally legislate safety, this, I think, will help us.

Clearly, it's not going to be foolproof. There are instances that I worry about, in terms of the enforcement. But I think it's probably a great step in the right direction, and I, for one, support it wholeheartedly. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator. Will you remark further?
Senator Williams.

SEN. WILLIAMS:

Thank you, Mr. President. I rise to support the bill. I want to thank Senator DeFronzo. I want to thank Governor Rell and all the folks who've worked so hard to move this forward.

You know, I remember when I turned 16, I couldn't wait to drive and get my license. I thought I was

jmk

294

Senate

April 16, 2008

plenty old enough. And the older I get, the younger 16 seems to me.

And I know, having lived through that time, you do feel invincible. You do feel like nothing is going to happen to you.

We know that once you get a 3,000- or 4,000-pound automobile flying down the road, in the blink of an eye, all of that can change with tragic consequences.

So we know that we all have to do better to get the attention of our young people so that they understand the importance of being as careful as they can, getting all the knowledge they can, and then being as responsible as they possibly can be for their own safety and for the safety of the passengers and the folks who depend on them.

This bill does that. It helps, I believe it's a partnership between the state and parents, helping parents get that message across to their children.

jmk

295

Senate

April 16, 2008

Now what this bill requires to ultimately be successful is then for the parents to partner with their children to make sure that happens.

I know my daughter is learning to drive. I've had the chance to ride with her, with her behind the wheel. The first couple of times that happened, it was sort of a white-knuckle experience. I had to kind of keep a straight face on.

But as time goes by, what you realize, it's a very important time period when you can pass on whatever accumulated wisdom you have as a parent and a driver of an automobile.

And you realize how critically important that time is and how important it is for you as a parent to take that time and to talk to your child and to underscore the awesome responsibility that they have when they are behind the wheel of a car.

No system here is perfect. We know what we're up against in terms of that feeling of invincibility.

jmk

296

Senate

April 16, 2008

But I think when we partner with parents through this legislation, and when, ultimately, parents partner with their children, then we can truly be successful in reducing teen accidents and teen fatalities. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator. The question is on passage of the bill in concurrence with the House. Seeing no further comment, the machine will be open.

THE CLERK:

An immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate. Will all Senators please return to the Chamber.

An immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate. Will all Senators please return to the Chamber.

THE CHAIR:

jmk

297

Senate

April 16, 2008

Have all the Members voted? Seeing all the Members have voted, the machine will be closed. Mr. Clerk, please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

Motion is on passage of House Bill 5748 in concurrence with the House.

Total number voting, 35; those necessary for passage, 18. Those voting "yea", 33; those voting "nay", 2. Those absent and not voting, 1.

THE CHAIR:

The bill passes. Senator Looney.

SEN. LOONEY:

Yes, thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, would move for a suspension for immediate transmittal to the Governor of Calendar 371, House Bill 5748.

THE CHAIR:

Seeing no objection, so ordered. Senator Looney.

SEN. LOONEY:

H-1017

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2008

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pat

135

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

2:54 o'clock p.m., to reconvene at the Call of the
Chair.)

(The House of Representatives reconvened at 3:28
o'clock p.m., Speaker Amann in the Chair.)

CLERK:

The House of Representatives will reconvene
immediately. Members to the Chamber.

The House will reconvene immediately.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Will the Clerk please call--

The House come back to order. My apologies.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar Number 253.

CLERK:

On Page 14, Calendar Number 253, Substitute for
House Bill Number 5748, AN ACT CONCERNING TEENAGE
DRIVERS, Favorable Report of the Committee on
Judiciary.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

pat

136

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Good afternoon, Sir.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Mr. Speaker, I move acceptance of the Joint Committee's Favorable Report and passage of the bill.

SPEAKER AMANN:

The question is on the acceptance of the Joint Committee's Favorable Report and passage of the bill. Will you remark, Sir?

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, House Bill Number 5748 consists of a lot of hard work over the last several months in regard to something, as we all know, when we pick up the paper over the last six or seven months, we've seen a lot of fatalities when it comes to teenagers.

And I have to say, ladies and gentlemen, being on the Transportation Committee for over the last six years, this had to be one of my toughest years.

pat

137

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Many of the Members of the Transportation Committee sat there and listened to the families who have lost their children, and it was very difficult.

And one thing that we heard over and over and over again was they look to us to do something. What could we do so that we could prevent this extraordinary thing never to happen again.

And today, ladies and gentlemen, we have a Bill in front of us. It causes some hardships. It's going to be tough on teens, but we do it because we love our children and we want to make sure that they'll be here. That is why we're doing this bill.

Mr. Speaker, the Clerk is in possession of an amendment. May the Clerk please call LCO Number 3987, and I be allowed to summarize.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Will the Clerk please call LCO Number 3987, which will be designated House Amendment Schedule "A".

CLERK:

LCO Number 3987, House "A" offered by Representatives Amann, Guerrera et al.

SPEAKER AMANN:

pat

138

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

The Representative seeks leave of the Chamber to summarize the amendment. Is there objection to summarization? Is there objection?

Hearing none, Representative Guerrero, you may proceed with the summarization, Sir.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This amendment is a strike all Amendment which becomes the bill.

Mr. Speaker, we've had great support among both aisles here, and I want to thank Representative Scribner, Representative O'Neill for their great help on this.

I want to thank Representative Fox who sat on Judiciary in regards to ironing out all the legal ramifications to this bill, and I will just summarize a few of the points of this bill.

What this bill will do, Mr. Speaker, it will strengthen restrictions and increase education requirements for teen drivers by offering current graduate driver license and driver ed requirements.

pat

139

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Learners permit further restricts who a learner's permit holder can have in the car and increases behind-the-wheel instructions from 20 to 40 hours.

The graduated driver's license increases the passenger restrictions holders from six months to one year. Also, Mr. Speaker, we will be changing the curfew from midnight to 11:00 o'clock p.m.

And in regard to driver's education, it requires that a parent or legal guardian attend the two-hour portion of the eight-hour safe driving instruction course with regards to graduated driver's license restrictions and dangers of teen driving.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that there will be some hardships in regard to this bill as it stands, but again, we're doing this for the simple reason that as we have had forums across the state from Danbury to Rocky Hill, and the number one issue was that, keep our children safe.

Put laws in place that will help them be around, and that is what we're doing.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I would like to yield to my colleague Representative Fox, to explain the

pat

140

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

changes affecting the youthful offender status in the motor vehicle violations.

I move adoption.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Thank you, Sir. The question before the Chamber is to move adoption of House Amendment Schedule "A". Is there objection? Hearing none, Representative Fox, do you accept the yield, Sir?

REP. FOX: (146th)

Yes, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER AMANN:

You may proceed, then, Sir.

REP. FOX: (146th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certain provisions of this amended proposal included how the State of Connecticut and our courts will deal with youthful offender statutes.

Obviously, all 16- and 17-year-olds are considered youthful offenders for purposes of any crimes. There are certain motor vehicle offenses that are also, at least in many of our criminal jurisdictions, included as youthful offender offenses.

pat

141

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Among those include reckless driving, driving with a suspended license, evading responsibility and failure to acknowledge an officer's signal.

What we did is, we identified those statutes, and I'm looking at, for the Members, Page 18, Lines 555 to 563, and what we did was, we put those specific statutes with respect to youthful offender crimes.

And what we did is, we then said that if there's a conviction with respect to those crimes, than an acknowledgment would be sent to the Department of Motor Vehicle indicating that this individual has plead guilty as a youthful offender to these motor vehicle offenses.

And the reason that this is necessary and why it's important is because what is happening now is that an individual could be driving, a 16-year-old could go 110 miles an hour, they could be charged with reckless driving.

They would then be assigned to the youthful offender docket in their courthouse, and they would plead guilty as a youthful offender and then that would be the end of it.

pat

142

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

So in order for there to be the next step, which is a suspension of the license following a conviction of one of these offenses, it was necessary that we included these specific offenses and the notification for the Department of Motor Vehicles.

And the way it will work is, DMV will then suspend the license for six months for a first offense upon these convictions. And hopefully that explains the youthful offender portion of this legislation.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Fox, would you repeat that last part, Sir, I'm sorry.

REP. FOX: (146th)

Yeah. I believe what I did was explain the youthful offender portion that I was yielded to with respect to Representative Guerrero.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Thank you, Representative. That part I didn't hear, Sir. I thank you.

Representative, you're all set? Thank you, Sir. Care to remark further on the amendment before us? Care to remark further? Representative Scribner.

pat

143

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

REP. SCRIBNER: (107th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of the amendment before us, which has become the bill, a Bill that is perhaps one of the most important and significant pieces of legislation that we will debate and act on during this Legislative Session.

And it's with a great sense of regret that I think we were brought to feeling compelled to bring these measures forward.

I say that not because I don't support it wholeheartedly, I say it because it is based on some very unfortunate and significant tragedies that have occurred in a variety of locations throughout the state, even after we've taken prior action and under current statute to implement what was believed to be a responsible and important program that addresses teen driving in recent years.

Having been involved in that issue for a number of years, I've had the opportunity of studying extensively what other states have done, and I think that we've had the opportunity to learn from other

pat

144

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

states that we may need to do more, and that is what is before us.

I think that we took significant effort in recent years to put into place meaningful pieces of proven successful measures, including passenger restriction, including curfews and including increased supervised driver training that was required before issuing a driver's license to those individuals who are minors and enjoy the privilege of getting a driver's license under the age of 18 in the State of Connecticut.

I must say that I am very impressed with the level of focused attention that has been paid to this significant issue, and it's been across the board.

I think we've had a very cooperative and supportive dialogue with the administration of the Department of Motor Vehicles, with the administration of the Governor's office, and certainly within the Legislature beginning in the Transportation Committee under the leadership of Representative Guerrero and all of us that serve there.

And then with the cooperation of the Judiciary Committee, other aspects of this legislation have been

pat

145

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

extensively scrutinized and considered as to what needs to happen next.

The one thing that's very clear is that we need to act so that the next thing that happens is not another unnecessary, unfortunate fatality in one of our communities here in Connecticut.

I think it's important to note that from all of the time that I've spent addressing this issue, I have never believed that it really had as much to do with age as it does have to do with lack of experience, and no matter what age you begin that process, you're going to begin at that same level.

So I think, with the recommendations that came through from the Task Force appointed by the Governor, which included all different aspects of people of concern, including parents who had lost children in these unfortunate fatalities, including Public Safety, including the Department of Motor Vehicles itself, and many other areas.

We've come forward with very carefully scrutinized legislation that does take things to a much further extent.

pat

146

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

It's my greatest hope that when we act on these measures that it is not perceived by the young people that we are here to serve and protect, that it is intended to be punitive.

It is, however, intended to be protective, not only of their lives and the lives of their passengers, but perhaps more significantly, and in a much broader way, the lives of every single individual that travels the roads here in Connecticut.

In many cases, there are fatalities that are caused by the inexperience of a young driver that are not his passengers, that are not himself or herself, but somebody that they just happen to come upon that happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and is severely injured or loses their life at the hands of that inexperience.

So I believe that we have a very significant moral obligation to all those that we serve, to support these much more significant efforts to address this issue, and create a much safer process and system for all here in Connecticut. Thank you.

SPEAKER AMANN:

pat

147

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Thank you, Representative. Care to remark further on the amendment before us? Representative Corky Mazurek.

REP. MAZUREK: (80th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon to you, Sir.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Good afternoon to you.

REP. MAZUREK: (80th)

Mr. Speaker, I rise in full support of this bill. First of all, I'd like to thank Representative Guerrera, Representative Mikutel for the job that you gentlemen did on this bill. You received a tremendous amount of information, not only from the Governor's Task Force on Teen Driving, but also a meeting that I held in Wolcott and a number of other Legislators.

I can't imagine how you managed to wrestle with this amount of data in such a short period of time and come out with what I think is such a great comprehensive Bill.

I'd also like to thank Representative Scribner on the other side of the aisle. I think a bill like this

pat

148

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

is not partisan, Sir. We know that it's something that we need to do together. We're only here to protect our children, and I think you so eloquently stood up and said that.

At this point, I'd also like to thank a couple of my very good friends, and that would be Representative Fox and Representative Nicastro.

We held a town meeting in December in Wolcott after we suffered a tragedy there, and both of those Representatives were kind enough to come down to Wolcott and help me manage the crowd and the questions and the frustration that was very apparent in the Wolcott community over the three deaths, needless deaths that we had in Wolcott, and I certainly thank both of you gentlemen for coming down.

Mr. Speaker, this was not a knee-jerk reaction to one accident. This was accident after accident. We started with the Bristol tragedy, four young people. We had Wolcott. We had three young people out there.

I think from there we went to Wallingford. There were two or three young people killed in Wallingford. I think we went down to your town, Mr. Speaker, down

pat

149

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

to Milford, and we had a tragedy down there, and we just keep racking up, four children down in Milford, we just keep racking up these senseless tragedies and we're angry and we're frustrated.

We're frustrated at these kids because they seem to get themselves in a position where they're a danger to themselves. They're a danger to the community, and we're frustrated and angry at ourselves because we can't seem to stop this in the State of Connecticut.

This is not a knee-jerk reaction. It's a very deliberate, thoughtful process on the part of the Transportation Committee, the Judiciary Committee, on what's the best way that we can go forward and try to drive home the fact that driving in Connecticut is a privilege.

It's not a right. It's a privilege that we grant, and certainly people came forward and said, Corky, we've got to change the age. Seventeen's too young. Go to 18 years old, let kids drive at 18 years old. That would be a knee-jerk reaction.

pat

150

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

We have a lot of young people who are very responsible and follow the laws of the State of Connecticut.

There were other people who came forward and said, why don't we put a governor on a car? Why don't we slow down the amount of speed that the kids can drive at? That's not the right way to go, either.

Other people said, why don't we prohibit certain cars from being sold to young people? That's not the type of legislation we want to go forward with.

What we want to do is, we want to make these young people responsible for their actions, and a couple of things came out of the Wolcott town meeting that I thought was important to share with you.

Number one, the reckless driving statute in the State of Connecticut is 85 miles an hour. Now, 85 miles an hour on Interstate 84 or Interstate 91 is a fairly fast speed. I think everyone will agree.

Eight-five miles an hour on Main Street in Wolcott or Glastonbury or Milford, is supersonic, and we were quite surprised to find out that reckless driving only encompassed 85 miles an hour.

pat

151

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

This bill, in fact, addresses that and it says if you're driving 20 miles an hour over the posted speed limit that, in effect, is reckless driving.

The second thing that came out of the Wolcott hearings was the fact that the police felt that they were powerless to do anything with these young people when they stopped them repeatedly for traffic violations in town, they could not in effect take their license.

The only thing that they could do is ticket them and allow them to go on their way. And I said, you know, my God, if a senior citizen, if an elderly person was stopped driving in Wolcott and they were a danger to the public, the police officer had the right to take their license on the spot.

They didn't have the same right with a 16-year-old or a 17-year-old. This bill also straightens that out.

If you're caught recklessly driving, if you're caught drag racing, if you're caught with passenger violations, passenger restriction violations in a car,

pat

152

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

the police officer can take your license on the spot. You're done driving for a 48-hour period.

You have to go back with a parent or guardian in order to get that license back from the police department, and I think that's an important tool for the police department to be able to slow down and get some of these young people to think about what they're doing when they get behind the wheel of a car.

It's holding them accountable. It's not doubling the fine for speeding or something like that, and a parent ends up paying the fine or part of the fine, or a bunch of kids chip in and pay the fine.

They lose the license for a 48-hour period, stand down and have to go back and get it from the police department.

I can't say enough, Representative Guerrera. You did a tremendous, tremendous job on this bill. I'm so happy to add my name to it.

I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, ladies and gentlemen, please let's move this bill forward and pass it and do something for the teenage drivers in Connecticut.

pat

153

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Thank you, Sir. Care to remark further on the amendment before us? Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY: (112th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, a question to the proponent of the amendment.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Please prepare your question, Madam. Frame your question, I should say. I apologize. Representative Guerrera, please prepare yourself for a question, Sir.

You may proceed, Madam.

REP. HOVEY: (112th)

Thank you, Sir. Representative Guerrera, can you tell me which, what percentage of teen drivers participate in a driver education program?

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Guerrera.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe it's 100% take the eight-hour course. Whether they take the driver

pat

154

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

training program, I don't have that answer for you.

The safety program that's eight hours, it's 100%.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY: (112th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And through you, Mr. Speaker, so I understand that every teen driver here in the State of Connecticut has eight hours of what we would consider direct instructions, but there is no way to specifically determine how many of those students that have that eight hours of instruction then move into an actual practicum of driving with a driver instructor?

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Representative, I believe it's about 35%.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY: (112th)

pat

155

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Thank you. And so then the other part of that population would be reliant on a parent to be the supervisor of the practicum piece?

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Yes, Representative.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Guerrero, please go through the Chair, please.

Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY: (112th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And through you, Mr. Speaker, Representative, then what, how does a parent account for their hours supervising that practicum in driving?

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Through you, Mr. Speaker, they would have to sign a certificate with an affidavit saying that they did that.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Hovey.

pat

156

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

REP. HOVEY: (112th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And through you, is there a certificate that's based on the word of the parent, it does not necessarily have dates and times and hours and all of that kind of documentation?

Through you.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Through you, Mr. Speaker. This new Bill allows new documentation to make sure that it is clarified in regard to the training that they did.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY: (112th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And through you, what is to prevent a parent from deciding that they really don't have the time or commitment to the 40 hours, and therefore they would just go ahead and sign that certification?

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Guerrero.

pat

157

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Through you, Mr. Speaker, again, we would hope that every parent would want to do that and there is no guarantee that they will.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY: (112th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, the good gentleman for his answers.

Mr. Speaker, I rise very conflicted about this piece of legislation. I'm conflicted for several reasons.

First of all, I'm conflicted because it's been put to us that if you love your children, then you would support this legislation and that of course, you would want to support this legislation because it's going to prevent tragedies.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that it is going to prevent tragedies. I would say, I'm a mother of an older young adult, who I felt it was my responsibility when it was his time to become a driver, to take him out and drive on the dirt roads up at our summer place

pat

158

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

long before it was actually a legitimate time for him to be driving.

But I also felt that the skills that he would need to be a good driver, I started developing when he was very, very young. In fact, I believe I started developing those skills as a parent very early on requiring him to be accountable, requiring him to be responsible from the moment that he took his bicycle route and asked to go up to the store to get candy and come back with his friends.

And as a parent, it's part of my responsibility to teach my child those aspects of responsibility, and also the greater sense of commitment to our community, so that when my son became a driver, I felt fairly confident that he was going to manage himself in a responsible way.

I also felt that it was part of my responsibility to put my child in a vehicle that actually wouldn't go 85 miles an hour, necessarily. His first vehicle was a car that he got from his grandfather. It had a fair amount of miles on it and wasn't necessarily the

pat

159

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

fastest nor the sloopest looking thing. I'm sure that the girls weren't particularly impressed by it.

But as a mother, I felt that it was safe and that he was in a vehicle that I knew, or at least felt, would stand him well if he were to be in an accident.

I have concerns about this legislation from another perspective. In my community I've talked with the police about the teen driving laws that we already have in place, and they tell me that they are nearly impossible to enforce.

There's no way to tell which of those teen drivers are actually of the age group and of the inexperience that they shouldn't have others in their cars, and the only way that they're really able to stop a teen driver is if that driver is driving in excess of speed or doing something that would be considered reckless.

So the enforcement piece of this legislation, and of the prior legislation is of grave concern to me.

As you know, I had recommended that we have a sticker in the window that said that these were probationary drivers so that our police enforcement

pat

160

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

officers could know immediately that that young teen was not supposed to have someone else, or a couple of someone else's in their cars.

The other thing that I am concerned about is that in talking with teens, they're pretty honest about the fact that they're not necessarily following the rules as we have laid them out now, so I'm not sure that imposing even stricter rules are really going, is really going to change anything about that.

We know the number is 35% of our teen drivers participate in a program and then have a professional who would then ride with them for this 40 hours. That's double the number of hours.

Right now we know that the driver's ed course is about \$500. Some are a little more expensive. I would imagine that those people that teach those courses are going to be looking at doubling those costs.

Those people who put their kids into a professional driver's training program do so because they know how important it is for their children to

pat

161

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

have qualified and supervised driver training and practicum on the road.

The other percentage of people, 65% of those people, 65% of our teen drivers are being supervised by parents, and in this particular legislation, I don't find anything that's going to accept, hold those parents accountable for assuring that those kids have had those 40 hours, except a document that they would sign off on.

Today with parents' busy lives, and coming and going and most families having both individuals working and some people working two and three jobs, I really have to call into question how many of those parents are actually going to know how many hours they have been in the passenger seat with their teen driver. So that causes me concern.

I do believe this bill has several things in it that are positive. The idea of allowing the police to take immediate action when they do see a driver who is being reckless is exactly what we want to have happen.

Again, that aspect of holding kids accountable, and enforcing the law as we have it now.

pat

162

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

The other piece that I know causes all of the families in my area concern is the decrease of the time from 12:00 o'clock to 11:00 o'clock.

We have a tremendous number of school activities that do not get over prior to 12:00 o'clock. There's not a prom that occurs that would be over by 12:00 o'clock and to decrease that time from 12:00 to 11:00, I think is unreasonable, and again, I think it adds a piece to this legislation that then entices kids to break the law.

So, Mr. Speaker, these are a few of the things that I'm struggling with. My constituency has talked to me about the other issues that have to do with siblings riding with each other, that tremendous inconvenience that's already in place because a parent can't ask their teen driver to pick up their younger sibling from school or from dance class or whatever.

So I'm not sure how I'm going to vote yet. I'm really interested in the debate that we have, but I will place this vote with a lot of conflict and reserve on both sides of this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

pat

163

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

SPEAKER AMANN:

Thank you, Representative. Representative Mikutel.

REP. MIKUTEL: (122nd)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this amendment. I think it needs to be said that teen driving is a very dangerous thing, and we should remember that car crashes are the leading cause of death and injury for teenagers, not only in this state, but across the nation.

In 2006, 50 people died in crashes involving 16- and 17-year-old drivers, and that's what this bill targets, 16- to 17-year-old drivers.

Now, no set of laws that we pass will end the carnage on the highways, but we as Legislators have a responsibility to do all that we can to reduce the carnage, and this bill, I believe, will reduce the carnage on the highways.

This bill will reduce the number of teen deaths and it will also reduce the number of permanent life-altering injuries. I believe that to the core of my heart. That's why this bill is very important. It is

pat

164

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

probably one of the most important bills that we will pass this Legislative Session.

The truth be told, Mr. Speaker, young people too often act in a reckless manner, and we need to address the fact that their activities lead to a lot of death and destruction.

So we're singling out 16 and 17-year-old drivers, but with good reason. Teens are simply not ready to handle the risk as well as older drivers.

The data is unchallengeable. The statistics are there for anyone to review. The only question is, do we have the will to pass the law, pass this into law?

This bill is a tough bill. It has real teeth in it. We are really sending a message today. If this bill becomes law, parents will get the message and teenagers will get the message that we're serious about reducing the death and injuries on our highways, that we are serious about letting teens go through the driver learning experience and live to tell about it.

And we shouldn't have, they should not have to pay with their lives because of a foolish mistake. We can reduce those mistakes, because the teeth in this

pat

165

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

law, which suspends the license of these teenagers will get their attention, more than what their parents tell them, because unfortunately there are many teens, some teens that do not listen to their parents, they listen to their peers.

Peer pressure is a powerful thing. It makes other teenagers do stupid things. But when you tell them, and they know that Johnny violated that graduated driving license law and now his license is suspended, or that Johnny lost his license for a year because he was drunk driving, believe me, that message gets all through the school system in a matter of hours.

So this is the way to send the message because the teens will listen when their license is suspended. There's tough penalties in here, but there's a good reason for it.

In other people there will be opposition. There will be some parents who don't want to go to this little two-hour course. They will say that they shouldn't be suspending their license on all these

pat

166

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

little infractions. It's going to cause inconvenience.

Yes, it does cause inconvenience, but the inconvenience is worth it because we are definitely saving lives and preventing permanent life-altering injuries.

And there's many stories that everyone here I'm sure can tell. But my sister-in-law is a nurse in the hospital and there's a 17-year-old boy that is now in that hospital. He's permanently paralyzed, 17 years old. He wanted to be a musician. He played in a band.

One night he's out driving, under the influence, gets in an accident. Now he's permanently bedridden. He cries all the time. He cries all the time, because he knows that the life that he wanted to live is now impossible. What a tragedy.

Multiply that incident many times over and you'll see the need for this bill, and we here today have the power and we should exercise that power because we will make life better.

pat

167

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

It will be less threatening to your children as they go out into the world. Less threatening to you as you go out into the world.

I urge passage of the amendment.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Thank you, Representative. Representative DelGobbo.

REP. DELGOBBO: (70th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, Sir.

SPEAKER AMANN:

You're welcome, Sir.

REP. DELGOBBO: (70th)

Mr. Speaker, I'm one of those who rise today in support of the amendment, which will become the bill that's before us, and certainly appreciate all the comments that have been made why the provisions have been as thoughtful as they are, and what brings us here today.

Certainly Representative Guerrera's statements and Representative Mazurek's statements about going across the state and listening to parents and families and the issues that they confronted in their

pat

168

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

communities. We've seen the tragedies in the newspaper.

I have some concerns about certain provisions of this bill, but it's certainly an issue that's appropriate for this Legislature or any Legislature to take up. What are the problems of the day, and what reasonable solutions can be put forward to try and make a situation better?

However, Mr. Speaker, I rise in support with one enormous, I guess, concern and will turn that concern into perhaps a hope.

The concern is that you know, should we pass this here today, I don't think we can promise to anybody, okay, your kids are now safe on the roads, or we are safe on the roads, or property is safe from destruction because we have evaluated this and we've found the problems and we've done our best to try and address each one of them.

I think that the proponents of this bill have done a marvelous effort at trying to deal with those issues.

pat

169

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

But what cannot be touched by this legislation or frankly, any other, is the concept that we can legislate common sense and personal responsibility.

And I think more importantly than any law we pass here today, is hopefully a message back to those parents who appeared at the town hall meetings everywhere, that you know, this is sort of a compact here, that we are amending our laws to update them on things like reckless driving and certain other education requirements, other provisions that we deem to be helpful to make a safer driving environment.

But you know, the stronger, the stronger safeguard of protection in our society will be encouraging individual responsibility by those drivers, and certainly the involvement of the families, the parents, those same parents that were concerned about what's going on out there.

You know, I don't pretend that everything is a father knows best, you know, 1950s sitcom kind of world out there. But we as a Legislature shouldn't continue to erode the importance of that individual responsibility.

pat

170

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

You know, I heard mentioned earlier that part of the problem was law enforcement did not have the ability if some, you know, one of the children or if a young driver got a couple of driving violations, you just issue the ticket. There's nothing else you could do.

And I hate to put it in this vernacular, I consider myself still pretty young. But I remember the day that if I came home with a speeding ticket, one, forget about two. Guess what? I don't care, not only would you pay the fine, but the parent would take your license away for a couple of weeks.

And it's more than just that kind of alert driving behavior. It was a sense that, all right, you know whether your child is behaving responsibly as Representative Hovey mentioned earlier in a lot of the other activities in their life.

You can get a sense of if they're acting irresponsibly in a lot of their other behaviors and attitudes, well then that's a reflection of what they're going to be like when they get behind the wheel of a car and you as a parent certainly have the

pat

171

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

authority, without passage of this law, to sit there and say, guess what? You're not taking the car. You don't have, I don't care whether you've got a license or not. This is the deal.

And I think we would do ourselves, and we would do our constituents well to make sure that that part of the message also is included here.

This legislation is hopefully, as I said at the beginning, some concerns, but maybe a compact between this Legislature and the State of Connecticut.

So many residents asked for a response to the tragedies that we see based on the reality in society today. This Legislature is acting.

The other half of that agreement should be a clear understanding of that personal responsibility of young drivers and of parents.

What really frustrates me is, I can hear some of the conversations by certain parents perhaps. Well, they passed this new law, okay, we're good and there's not a change in their own attitudes.

Now we all know many parents who are extraordinarily engaged in their children's lives as

pat

172

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

they should appropriately. And we know, unfortunately, others that are less so.

But where that doesn't happen we shouldn't create an environment where, you know, there's a law on the books and we all know, young people are always going to find different ways around it. We've already heard of some potential loopholes in the current proposal before us.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think all of the proponents on both sides of the aisle who worked hard and the Task Force, deserve enormous credit for the effort that they put in to, as Representative Mazurek mentioned, not just knee-jerk legislation to look good, but in fact substantive components of a statutory framework to protect the citizens of the state.

So I applaud all of them and I appreciate that as somebody who will be supporting it.

I'd likewise ask any and all of us who care to do so, to remind our constituents when we're suggesting on how good this bill is, we go just as strongly to them and guess what?

pat

173

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

You can do something even more powerful, and that's your own involvement with your children in creating a sense of maturity and personal responsibility. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Mushinsky.

REP. MUSHINSKY: (85th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support the amendment, which becomes the bill.

And I'd like to thank the group of people, Governor Rell and her Teen Driving Task Force, DMV Commissioner Bob Ward, our former colleague, Representative Guerrera and the Transportation Committee, some Members of Judiciary and the DUI Reform Working Group and my colleagues who moved by local tragedies in their own district, used their experiences there to write better law to better protect our young people from death and injury.

An earlier speaker had said that age had nothing to do with these tragedies, but actually it does. We know that teens are biologically more prone to impulsive behavior due to their incomplete development

pat

174

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

of the frontal lobe of their brain. That's the part that governs restraint and judgment.

And we know that parents are not always aware of their offspring's behavior away from home. We know that inexperienced impulsivity and parental ignorance can be a lethal combination, and Wallingford recently had its own share of these tragedies and our hearts went out to those parents and their families.

When writing this law the first problem was to find a way to tighten the laws on the irresponsible teens without affecting the responsible ones who are using their cars safely every day to get to work and to assist their friends and their family.

The solution to the first problem is in Section 8 of the amendment. It's an instant repercussion for irresponsible behavior such as speeding or carrying passengers in violation of passenger restrictions for new drivers or driving under the influence.

There's a summary suspension of license seizure for a fixed period of time. This is a powerful consequence for a teenager that will discourage reckless behavior.

pat

175

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Parents now will become aware of this violation. That was not always true in the past, but now they will become aware of the violation as they must personally accompany the teen to retrieve their license. This is a new requirement, and we must also notify the parents of any motor vehicle violation by their 16- or 17-year-old.

The second problem in writing this law has been to determine how to involve the parents as the previous speaker just alluded to. We have to involve them more intensively in their knowledge of the special restrictions on new drivers, particularly the part of the course, the safe driving course that covers the restrictions on new drivers.

The solution to this problem is in Section 9 of the amendment. It requires the parent or guardian to attend two hours' instruction on teen driving laws.

Now we will no longer have to fear that parents do not know the requirements of a new driver. We will all be knowledgeable partners in a team effort to prevent any more of our young people from losing their lives in preventable accidents.

pat

176

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

This is a really fine bipartisan piece of work and I offer my sincere thanks to all the drafters on both sides of the aisle.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Reynolds.

REP. REYNOLDS: (42nd)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise in support of the amendment before us, which becomes the bill. This emphasis on teen drivers is more than justified and the provisions of this bill are highly reasonable next steps in what is the most [inaudible] strategy to reduce teen fatalities on our roadways in Connecticut.

The crash rate per 10,000 in population for 16- to 17-year-olds is 50% higher than the crash rate for 35- to 49-year-olds, despite the fact that many in that younger age group do not even have licenses.

The crash rate for 10,000 in population for 18- to 19-year-olds is 100% higher than the crash rates for 35- to 49-year-olds, and approximately 75% of 16- to 17-year-olds involved in auto accidents are judged to be at fault.

pat

177

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Teen drivers aged 16 to 19 die in motor vehicle crashes at a rate three times the rate for drivers 35 to 49.

Now it may be true that recent fatalities in Connecticut, the publicity that surrounded them and all the emotion that was engendered as the result of those events may be the reason this bill is before us today.

However, I think the substance of the bill before us is backed by more than emotion, but rather is backed by significant data and empirical studies to justify the focus of the bill before us.

National and state data continues to show that fatality and crash rates are dramatically higher during the first few months of driving.

Fatality and crash rates are dramatically higher during the initial hours of driving.

Fatality and crash rates are dramatically higher for driving that occurs late at night.

Fatality and crash rates are dramatically higher when a teenage driver has teenage passengers.

pat

178

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

And fatality and crash rates are dramatically higher when there is alcohol present in the car.

This data is compelling. It exists, and it continues to be rational, reasonable and substantive arguments for what is before you today.

So as much as the emotion is what inspires this comprehensive legislation to come before us today, I think there is much more than that that encourages your support of the bill before us.

I want to commend Chairman Guerrero, Ranking Member Scribner, Representative Fox, for the superlative legislation and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I urge adoption of the amendment.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Thank you, Representative. Will you remark further? Representative Witkos.

REP. WITKOS: (17th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity to briefly scan the amendment that's before us after I read in detail this morning, the bill, and I had some additional questions, if I may, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the proponent of the amendment.

pat

179

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

SPEAKER AMANN:

Please frame your question, Sir, and please prepare yourself for questions. You may proceed, Sir.

REP. WITKOS: (17th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many parts of the bill, if you're, there's a requirement that you're under suspension or you cannot get something until a certain date or there's some passenger restrictions, all of those requirements end at age 18.

In Lines 14 through 19, if you're stopped for operating under the influence, and you're given a penalty if you exceed the elevated blood alcohol level you're suspended for six months and if you refuse to take the test it's one year.

If you turn 18 before that period lapses, does the penalty end, or does it continue through past your 18th birthday? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER AMANN:

I apologize, Sir. Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Through you, Mr. Speaker, the suspension stays in effect.

pat

180

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Witkos.

REP. WITKOS: (17th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I move through the bill, I just would like, and I had a question just so the Chamber can be made aware of it, Lines 119 when we had, we changed the exam, the comprehensive test so the students would know what the laws are requiring motor vehicles and the rules of the road from a shall to a may.

If the fine Representative would mind explaining to the Chamber why we're saying that the Commissioner may include a test rather than shall include a test?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, can you repeat the question?

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Witkos, please repeat the question.

pat

181

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

REP. WITKOS: (17th)

Sure. On Line 119 it speaks of that the current language is the Commissioner shall make sure that a comprehensive test of the rules of the road and the knowledge of the students be tested, and we changed the word shall to a may.

I would ask that the Representative explain the purpose behind that. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, it was changed that way so that the Department may issue to a learner's permit so they wouldn't have to take it twice.

SPEAKER AMANN:

Representative Witkos.

REP. WITKOS: (17th)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I understand that they may be doing a comprehensive test at the beginning before they go in to take, apply for the learner's permit and not necessarily at the end, so

pat

182

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

the students may be more fully aware when they go to apply for their learner's permit that these are the rules of the road, so that clears it up.

On Lines 316 and 317 it speaks of a first violation of Subdivision 4 of Subsection (a) of Section 219. I looked at my computer and I only saw that it went only up to Subdivision Number 3.

So if the Representative could explain what Subdivision 4 is of that Subsection, I would appreciate it. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Through you, Madam Speaker. Nice to see you. Section 4 is a new section in regard to the 16- and 17-year-olds with regard to the speeding violations.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Witkos.

REP. WITKOS: (17th)

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I have somewhat of a concern of that, ladies and gentlemen of the Chamber.

pat

183

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

It says, speaks of Section 14, 219, and that means if you're doing over 55 miles an hour. And we have a major highway that runs through our state, east to west, Route 44, and those of you who have the opportunity to travel that road, know that the speed limit is generally 60, 65, 70 miles an hour, although the posted speed limit is 35 and 40 on that roadway.

I know it, because that's one of the biggest complaints that I get of speeders on that road.

If a student or a 16-year-old was stopped for doing 56 miles an hour on that road, 11 miles an hour over the posted speed limit in some cases, they would lose their license, I believe, for 60 days under this.

That means if they got a ticket issued to them by a police officer they'd pay \$137 fine and we've made it easier to pay the ticket now, because we said if you pay the ticket and not take it to court, you won't have the fine assessed to you, the points assessed on your driver's license, so there's an incentive just to send a check in, pay that money.

So you pay \$137 fine and then you basically, in essence, plead guilty. And now comes this section

pat

184

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

that if you plead guilty, my interpretation, and I stand corrected if I'm wrong, if the fine Representative would like to correct me, you will lose your license for 60 days for the first offense. Much more stringent than the 48 hours.

Now as we move on to the 48-hour section, it says, shall be suspended for 48 hours on the date and time such complaint is issued.

Through you, Madam Speaker, if someone was involved in a motor vehicle accident, oftentimes, and they're transported to a hospital or an emergency care service and the police officer doesn't have the opportunity to issue the infraction at that specific time, they do it at a much later date, does the 48-hour suspension come into play when they're actually handed the infraction, or is it at the time the occurrence took place? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Through you, Madam Speaker, at the time of the license, physically taking the license.

pat

185

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Witkos.

REP. WITKOS: (17th)

Through you, Madam Speaker, if I have to apply for a warrant for somebody's arrest, they were involved in a motor vehicle accident, they were transported to a hospital and I've come up that there's some charges applicable, and I call that person down to the police department, I say, bring your driver's license with you.

At that point in time, that's when the license is seized for a 48-hour period? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Yes, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Witkos.

REP. WITKOS: (17th)

Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, I also have some concern as we move through the bill where it

pat

186

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

states that the police officers shall immediately seize and take possession of such person's motor vehicle operator's license.

If the person doesn't have their operator's license with them, what used to happen was we used to charge them with failure to carry their license. We'd run it through the Department of Motor Vehicles' computer to make sure that they were a valid current operator license.

But now it says we have to go and immediately seize it. I wonder. Does that mean we have to follow the person to their home and seize that license from them? What happens if they're from another part of the state and they're in violation of the curfew hours?

Oftentimes people get lost. I've been telling people that are from Fairfield County, often in my neck of the woods at midnight, under this it may be a violation. I'd have to seize their driver's license immediately.

If they don't have it on them, I guess I'm instructed under the law to go get it. It's very,

pat

187

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

very difficult for small and local municipal police departments to follow the letter of the law.

Then it says that we'll hold the driver's license and we'll make sure a parent has to come and sign for it and acknowledge that they got it.

Well, I hope that as we move forward that through the regulations of the DMV that the DMV provide the form, because I can see us having many, many different forms, or just a scrap piece of paper, just sign here saying that you got it.

Because some departments say, well that's evidence, and we're going to have to enter into that into the evidence from now because it's evidence of the crime.

And guess what? That's locked up in a specific location, so maybe the person that's responsible for the evidence room isn't available to release it after 48 hours. That's a concern.

Then as we move through the bill, it says if you complete one of these things, reckless driving, drunk driving, again the police shall immediately seize the

pat

188

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

license and shall cause such motor vehicle to be removed.

Now, I've got to tell you, during the first snowfall people like to go out there and spin their tires and do a few donuts because they just want to get their little winter legs underneath them.

There's a passenger in the car or somebody in close proximity, guess what? That's reckless driving. You just caused yourself a 48-hour immediate suspension and your car to be towed.

It says, shall cause such motor vehicle to be removed. There's no discretion there. It's been taken away. A concern, again.

While I agree with many of the intents behind the bill, a lot of the discretion is taken away from the officers.

I like the fact that there's an immediate suspension, but to immediately seize, I think that's a problem.

And through you, Madam Speaker, if I could direct a question to Representative Fox.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

pat

189

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Representative Fox, please prepare yourself.

Representative Witkos.

REP. WITKOS: (17th)

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Representative Fox spoke of youthful offender section of the bill, and I'm curious. These deal with arrests and convictions of these specific crimes.

But currently, police officers can issue a written warning under 14-111(a), which is possession of alcohol in a motor vehicle, and since it's not a conviction, I'm wondering how does the youthful offender status impact that as it's just a written warning and an administration sanction?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Fox.

REP. FOX: (146th)

The way I, through you, Madam Speaker, the way I understand the possession of alcohol by a minor is that it is an infraction. It does include a license suspension with it, but it is an infraction.

pat

190

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

What we attempted to do is address those motor vehicle offenses that are being crimes that would have a potential incarceration period. So those are the ones that are addressed here with respect to the youthful offender statute, and those would include the reckless driving, evading responsibility, obeying of a police officer's signal, anything that would deal with a period of incarceration.

I'd also like to point out, just while I was listening to the Representative's statement regarding the speeding issues. The change to General Statute 14-219, what it does is, it includes a provision if there's any 16- or 17-year-old traveling more than 20 miles an hour over the posted speed limit.

I believe the sample that was given included 11 miles over the posted speed limit, so that would not result in a mandatory suspension, so I wanted to clarify that as well. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Witkos.

REP. WITKOS: (17th)

pat

191

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Thank you, Madam Speaker. And I understand that section of the bill that the fine Representative spoke of. Reading Lines 311 through 317 I guess I have a different interpretation of that.

But I do have another question for Representative Fox. Initially, I thought that reading the statute evading responsibility, the part was applicable only to serious physical injuries, but I have some concern now, because if it's a property damage only accident, would that fall under these guidelines?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Fox.

REP. FOX: (146th)

Through you, Madam Speaker, yes. If somebody is driving and hits something and causes damage to property that is evading responsibility.

There is another section of evading responsibility statute that is a more serious section that also would include either death or serious physical injury.

pat

192

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

But the damage to property is considered evading responsibility. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Witkos.

REP. WITKOS: (17th)

Thank you, Madam Speaker. And I guess once again, I have some grave concerns now with that added extra part on there.

If you're driving down the roadway and you hit a mailbox, it's an icy day and it's late at night and you say, well, gee, I knocked a mailbox over or spun out. I'm going to go home and I'm going to, when I wake up in the morning I'll go talk to the owner of the mailbox and try to get it replaced, you have violated the law, ladies and gentlemen.

It's in the law, it says you shall immediately stop and report it to the police department. I can't tell you how many accidents I've investigated property damage only, where somebody made a mistake or their child, a 16- or 17-year-old was nervous about what happened. They wanted to go home and tell mom and

pat

193

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

dad, so that was the first thing they did. They went home.

They didn't call the police right away. And then the person, the victim or the property owner called up and said, a car just took off. That's evading responsibility.

In essence, he was a frightened operator who just wanted to go home and tell his or her parents first because they didn't know what to do.

So now, that person is going to have their license suspended for 48 hours and basically, their vehicle, well, hopefully it won't be seized if it's in their driveway.

But I guess I'll sit and I'll listen to the rest of the, remaining of the debate and I'll make my decision as the bill goes forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Thank you, Representative Witkos.

Representative Noujaim.

REP. NOUJAIM: (74th)

pat

194

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good afternoon, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Good afternoon, Sir.

REP. NOUJAIM: (74th)

Madam Speaker, I think so far everyone who has spoken in reference to this amendment, which will become the bill has essentially had some issues with it.

I remember when our colleague, the Ranking Member, Representative Scribner said reluctantly. But I will do the same. I intend to support the bill, but I also say with some sadness, I support this bill, because there are several issues that are of importance that we as lawmakers would not be able to control people in their everyday lives.

Madam Speaker, I'm a Member of the Transportation Committee and during the public hearing, people came to speak before us to testify on this bill. Some parents cried and they begged us to introduce some laws that will make some stiffer laws in reference to teen driving.

pat

195

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

And I listened to those programs. I listened to what they had to say. But most importantly, from a different angle, I looked to the police department and they say how much the police can do, how far can they go.

Can they be after or behind everyone trying to witness them and to see how they are driving, if they are evading responsibility, if they are breaking the law, and how can we control it, and how can we enforce it at all times?

But the thing that struck me more than anything else, Madam Speaker is, I watched on cable access television in Waterbury, the open forum that Representative Mazurek, Senator Caligiuri and Representative Nicastro had in Wolcott, and I saw those parents coming in and talking to them.

I watched the whole thing on cable access because Waterbury and Wolcott are on the same cable access system.

And I saw parents coming in and crying, and basically testifying, begging us, begging us, to do something. Begging us to do something.

pat

196

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

And let me tell you, Madam Speaker, the person in Wolcott who committed a great crime had wrecked his car a few months earlier, but he was alone in his vehicle. He got into a very bad accident and he totaled his car.

He was told by many people, people that I know, people that I respect. They said to the child, next time you enter into another accident, you are going to kill somebody. They told him this.

And when he got into another accident, not only did he kill himself, but he also killed his sister and he also killed a young friend, which was totally unfortunate.

So what are we saying here? We are putting together more laws against teenage driving. But I think, and I am hoping that this law and the people who are watching us throughout the entire State of Connecticut, it would be a wake up call for parents and for guardians, that we can put all the laws that we want, but if guardians and if parents do not get involved in the lives of their children and give

pat

197

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

guidance to those children, this will happen all the time and it will continue to happen.

As they always say, a little bit of a precaution will go a long way.

And Madam Speaker, allow me just to say from my own personal experience. My kids went to college, and even in college they did not have cars. Now I see children in high school driving their own vehicles and they only live down the street from the high school. Is it necessary?

We cannot regulate this. We cannot tell people what to do. But I hope that parents and guardians will look at these tragedies and say to themselves, it's the right thing to do. We need to give guidance to our children.

And I do intend to support this amendment, Madam Speaker, which becomes the bill. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Thank you, Representative Noujaim.

Representative Frey.

REP. FREY: (111th)

pat

198

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Like, I guess most of the previous speakers, I'm a little torn with this bill. I think in reaction to what's happened in this state, we need to take, make further restrictions on youthful drivers.

On the other hand, it gets down to personal responsibilities and parental responsibilities, so I think in the end I will support the bill, but with some concerns as expressed by others.

I do though, have one question for the proponent of the bill, through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Guerrero, please prepare yourself.

REP. FREY: (111th)

Just one question. A few years ago when we put this original curfew in place, we had exempted under 18 drivers who participated in volunteer fire departments, and we corrected a year or two ago permitting safe [inaudible] drivers.

Do those exemptions still exist with this change in the curfew, this age 17?

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

pat

199

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Through you, Madam Speaker, to the Representative, yes, they all stay in place.

REP. FREY: (111th)

Okay. I just wanted to clarify that. Thank you very much.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Thank you, Sir. Representative Nicastro.

REP. NICASTRO: (79th)

Good afternoon, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the amendment, which is the bill.

You know, tough times require tough action, and no matter what this House does, no matter how hard we try, we'll always be criticized because some people will say we should have done something better, or we should have done something less.

When I was a young boy growing up and I did something wrong, that spoon came out of the kitchen cabinet, and I used to get that little whack, and I used to say to my mom, why do you spank me?

She said, I spank you because I love you.

pat

200

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

I think the message we're trying to send out here is that we love these children, and we want them to see, we want to see them grow up and have a fruitful life.

Several months ago we had a major tragedy in the City of Bristol. Four teenagers were killed. That investigation is complete, and that car was clocked at approximately 140 miles an hour. I repeat, 1, 4, 0. And those lives were lost, but the lives of senior citizens were also severely suffered in injuries.

A short time later, in my sister city in Wolcott, we had three young teenagers killed again in another motor vehicle accident.

And the sad point about it, Madam Speaker, is on the day, on the day of that funeral we arrested a gentleman coming down Route 69 in Bristol from Wolcott, doing 106 miles an hour.

Someone is not getting the message. The only way they're going to get the message is by doing what we're doing today.

A short time ago, I believe down in the Milford section of the state, we had several young teenagers

pat

200

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

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pat

201

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

lose their lives again. What you may not be aware of, one of those young teenagers who lost his life was the son of a Bristol resident, but the grandson of a former Majority Leader of this House that we stand in today. And it's not going to end.

This situation is continuing to get worse unless we put the brakes on. The bill is tough, but it needs to be tough.

I was a youth officer for 17 years in the City of Bristol and my job was to deal with young teenagers, and I saw what happened, and if you didn't take action properly and you let them get away with things, it just got worse.

This bill goes a long way to send out a message that we will not tolerate. It's not a form of punishment. What it's trying to say is there's consequences for your actions.

No police officer, no chaplain, nobody wants to go to a parent's home and say, we have some bad news. Your child was just killed in a car accident. Nobody wants to do that.

pat

202

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

And unless we start taking strong action, Madam Speaker, this isn't going to stop. We need to do it. We're not doing it to punish. We're doing it because we love our kids and we want to see them grow up, we want to see them.

And today, you know, you stop and take a look at what's happening and you say, well, how can we do something about it? This is how we can do something about it.

Representative Corky Mazurek held a, he held like a session in Wolcott. I was in attendance with that with Representative Fox. We also had a Senator present and a few other people, and if you could have heard those people that came forward and spoke, and begged us to take action on this. They literally begged us to take action.

They weren't accusing us. They were asking us to take action. And yes, I've received emails and phone calls from parents who said, don't punish us. Why should we have to go to a two-hour class? My children are good children. They'll abide by the law, and I make sure my children obey.

pat

203

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

And my answer to that is, it's not a form of punishment. It's to deal with everybody. You may be a good parent. You may be the fine parent. But the next parent may not be, and that's why we have to do certain things.

This bill is not perfect, Madam Chairperson. No bill is ever perfect, but it goes a long way to try and resolve this issue that's going on in this great state.

We have a chance now to put the brakes on. We would be remiss of our responsibilities if we did not pass this legislation. It's not perfect, but it's a start in the right direction.

And Madam Chairman, I stand in support and I hope my colleagues on both sides of this aisle and upstairs will support it, too. Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Thank you, Representative Nicastro.

Representative Ruwet.

REP. RUWET: (65th)

pat

204

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and certainly I appreciate the indulgence of a few more minutes on this very important piece of legislation.

It's always difficult, I think, to stand up with great concern. I think there's a commercial out that we want to, it's got bubble wrap around a child and I think it's for an insurance commercial that's basically trying to protect their child from their involvement in any sports activities.

This is certainly, you know, a very courageous Bill on the part of the proponents of the bill in terms of trying with their sincere intent to protect our children.

I do, unfortunately, have concerns. You know, in the Children's Committee we've talked about having parent education at a very young age. I wish we didn't need to do that, but unfortunately as we move forward and we look at pieces of legislation that in my mind, look at parent responsibility instead of school responsibility, instead of state responsibility, but parental responsibility and obligation.

pat

205

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

And I have to say there's been lots of discussion. Many attorneys within this Chamber that I think are proponents and certainly supporters of this bill, but I respect and admire one law enforcement officer who actually will take this legislation and have to put it into practice and put it into reality, and how in fact they will do that.

I do have a question, through you, Madam Speaker, to the proponent of the bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Please proceed, Madam.

REP. RUWET: (65th)

In the language of the bill it requires a parent or guardian to attend two hours of instruction on teen driving laws and related issues with the child before, well, you know what I'm talking about, the two hours.

We have children who have been abused and neglected within our foster care system who are 16 and 17 years old, and still under the custody of the State of Connecticut, who in fact will be required to go for those two hours of training to allow that 16- or 17-year-old who have been under the care of DCF.

pat

206

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Guerrera.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Thank you, Madam Speaker, through you, that individual would still have to have a parent or a legal guardian with them.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Ruwet.

REP. RUWET: (65th)

Thank you, Madam Speaker. But as you well know, these children do not have a legal guardian. The state is actually a [inaudible] legal guardian, so will that require the staff, the foster parent of which he or she may have several children under their care? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Guerrera.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe the law as it states now that that person could then not get a

pat

207

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

license no matter what. They would still have to have their legal guardian or a parent with them or else they could not get their license under laws today.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Ruwet.

REP. RUWET: (65th)

Sadly, I'm sorry to hear that. There are children within the foster care system, who through no fault of their own are within that system because of abuse and neglect of a guardian or parent.

And if this in fact limits them from the opportunity for employment, some of them may want to work at a Price-Chopper or some kind of fast food and need transportation, it would then be the obligation of the foster parent to drive that foster child.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes. That means that parent would have to drive them to and from the place of their employment.

pat

208

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

And again, I'd just like to state, though, through you, Madam Speaker to the Representative, as the law states today, you do need a parent or legal guardian no matter what, even if there wasn't this two-hour provision in there to obtain a driver's license.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Ruwet.

REP. RUWET: (65th)

We're in this Chamber to change many laws. I hope we will consider that. But it is certainly a concern of mine as we move forward, and those who are single parents who are struggling to really raise responsible children, and I have been a single parent, had to be behind the wheel with two young teenage drivers, having them go through school parking lots hoping they won't hit too many curbs, but spent many hours, many hours, trying to ensure that they were safe drivers.

Those with a two-parent family, and my cousin was here today with another cousin who had seven children. She's a year younger than I am and he broached the

pat

209

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

question, you know, how will Alice, with seven children comply with this, or would she need to comply with this?

And I think about that, you know. This is, these are demands on parents of which in my opinion should already be the responsibility and the obligation of parents to ensure that their child is safe, whether it's with the bubble wrap, or whether it is protecting them with the right gear and the equipment that they play in their sports.

It is their responsibility and obligation. Within this piece of legislation, I don't see any parent liability.

What in fact will be the liability for the parent? What will be the charges against the parent if in fact they have not, in fact, provided safe measures for having their child drive safely?

If it's still under that parent or guardian, I almost feel that this legislation should go further and provide some liability on the parent.

Earlier, it was stated, and having spent five weeks in a unit in a hospital where no one should want

pat

210

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

to see a child in danger, and seeing head injuries from individuals who have been in motorcycle accidents. We don't have a helmet law in this state.

So we are continuing to put risk for our children even those who are driving motorcycles, but I won't bring that up.

Having a child injured in any method brings sadness to, I think, every person in this Chamber. But do we pass legislation each time a tragedy occurs?

So I, with sadness, I am opposing the amendment to this bill, which tracks the bill, and I hope to be able to work, you know, closer with Legislators through the next Legislative Session should we be, should our contract be renewed by the voters.

But in fact, it is with sadness, because it's always hard to stand up and oppose a legislation where I know the intent is sincere to protect our children, but unfortunately, I don't agree with it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Thank you, Representative Ruwet. Representative John Stripp.

pat

211

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

REP. STRIPP: (135th)

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to support the bill, even though I do have some concerns about it, and I'm sure we're going to be back here at some point in time in the future amending it.

It's not perfect, but it's going in the right direction and what we're doing here is just too important not to move forward in this particular step at this time.

Madam Speaker, I want to hearken back a number of years. Both my daughter and my son when they were in high school, in each case, in their high school senior class they had tragic accidents, not involving them but involving their classmates, and quite frankly, Madam Speaker, now they're in their early forties.

When that group gathers together and talks about their lives and what has happened, they still grieve about the situations. That's how tragic it is, and that's how long-term the harm is to people.

And, Madam Speaker, after we pass this bill it's not going to solve all the problems. It's not going to protect everyone, every teenage driver, but it's a

pat

212

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

step in the right direction. It's something we have to do, we should do. We may have to adjust it as we go along, but it is a step in the right direction.

Madam Speaker, I received a letter from a high school student just yesterday and I was preparing an amendment to the bill when it passes, but I think perhaps that amendment will not be necessary.

Generally, the letter went into constitutional issues and it was very nicely written. It was three or four pages, and I feel I have to respond to it because it was a feeling that this young man was becoming cynical about his government and could not respond to issues that were of concern.

And he said, well, I have my license. I'm still 16. I'm about 17. Are you now going to, after I've done everything you asked me to do as Connecticut law, you're going to take my privileges away after I worked so hard for them.

Now, at my age, perhaps that doesn't seem like such a big issue, but I remember when I was 16, I went to summer school for ten weeks to get the license at 17 instead of having to wait until 18 as the law was

pat

213

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

in New York City at that time. And it was that important to me.

And, Madam Speaker, I know this young gentleman, it's very important to him, and he follows the laws. He's a very responsible young man, and I would like to ask one question, through you, Madam Speaker, of the proponent of the bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Please proceed, Sir.

REP. STRIPP: (135th)

If a young man is 17 years old, has his license and he's now in the process under Section 4(a)(1) and (2) and he's partially through, or all the way through the three-month period and we're going to change that to six, he's partially through, or all through the six-month period and we're going to change that to a year, would he be thrown back into the new rules after August 1st, or would he still be under the old rules in terms of passengers and that sort of thing as outlined in Subsection 4(a)(1) and (2)?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

pat

214

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Through you, Madam Speaker, he would be under the new rules, Representative Stripp.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Stripp.

REP. STRIPP: (135th)

Okay. Under the new rules, so he would be restricted in that.

Madam Speaker, I'm sorry to hear that. When the bill passes, I will not bring my amendment up, because I want to make sure it doesn't create some other problems.

But, Madam Speaker, I have a feeling that after we pass this, perhaps in the next Session we're going to be back adjusting this because there are some issues that are problems, although I will be voting for the amendment and the bill when the time comes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Thank you, Representative Stripp. Representative Ferrari.

pat

215

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

REP. FERRARI: (62nd)

Thank you, Madam Speaker, just a couple of comments. I know we've pretty much debated this in a great deal of detail, and I respect everybody's opinion of the bill, and the comments and the tragedies that occurred and trying to do something about it.

I sometimes think we're going to create a false hope, that this is actually going to prevent tragedy. I kind of disagree with that.

Teenagers, young people being what they are, they're going to do some silly things and they're going to do some dangerous things, and again, I can't remember when I was sixteen, but I did some pretty silly things myself.

We think we're correcting this problem, but I'm afraid that some of the young people are going to get themselves into trouble. Some are going to get hurt and some are going to get killed, and then what are we going to tell our constituents? Then what are we going to do to correct the situation?

pat

216

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

I do agree with the immediate suspension of offenders' licenses. I think that's a great idea because that puts the onus on the person who's committing the crime.

I also think that extending the time for carrying passengers, etc., is a good idea because distractions are some of teenagers' most dangerous elements when they are playing around in their automobiles.

I do have an issue, however. The bill kind of lumps all young drivers, most of whom drive well, drive within the law, obey the rules, and it kind of lumps them all with those irresponsible drivers and kind of gives a scattergun approach to how we enforce the law.

We are in effect punishing them for obeying the law instead of going after those responsible for it. And also, I think that they, and I can understand why the proponents might want some parents to be involved in what the laws are, but most of the time those parents aren't in the car with the young people when they're driving in any case.

pat

217

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

And I think it's more important for the young person to know what their responsibility and what the laws are.

If we want to train or retrain adult drivers, maybe we should take the bull by the horns and tell everybody that we need to train adult drivers, because they certainly, on my trips up Route 91.

And I'm sure everybody in this Chamber can identify situations where we've seen some people our age doing silly things behind the wheel, whether it's distracted driving, whether it's on the cell phone, whether it's discussing politics with their passengers, such and such.

So I think that if we want to take that kind of attack, then we ought to really address it by going right to the source.

So there's two elements of the bill that I like, elements of the bill that I don't like, and at the moment, at this particular moment, I'm not entirely sure if I'm going to vote for it or not.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

pat

218

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Thank you, Representative Ferrari.

Representative Ken Green.

REP. GREEN: (1st)

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise in opposition to this amendment, which I understand is the bill.

I do want to make it clear that I do agree that we need to address the issue of safe driving. We need to address the issue of teenage driving, and I understand the whole issue with graduated drivers and what we're trying to do here.

But I really think that we're going about it in a somewhat wrong way, that if we're really concerned about that age group and whether or not they should be driving, what this bill does is, that this bill doesn't necessarily remove any young persons from the road that will currently be on the road.

And if the issue is on safety on the number of young people on the road, this bill doesn't do that. This bill tries to add situations where they could either get more training, [inaudible] more responsible

pat

219

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

drivers, but in fact, this bill does not keep any less 16- or 17-year-olds on the road.

And so the possibility of some of those statistics around accidents and other kinds of issues may still be the same, because this doesn't remove drivers off the road.

I believe, and I'm going to make it clear, because as I vote no for this, I will vote no not because I don't believe we should do this, but I believe that we should raise the age of driving to 17 years old.

I think that what we're doing here is, we're trying to add all of these piecemeal situations, all of these conditions, all of these conditions that I think is going to say to a 16-year-old, I can't have a number of passengers in the car. I got to have someone over 21. I can't drive at this time.

We've heard, and I've heard a lot of people talk about when they were 16 years old. The way 16-year-olds are today, I've got to tell you, I don't believe are like any of us when we were 16 years old. They're

pat

220

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

different in a lot of ways in terms of their development, their thought processes.

But one of the things that is similar and the same that I find in 16-year-olds, and I work with them every day, is that 16-year-olds are still at the developmental stage where they're interested in basically two areas.

They are quite rebellious and they want to feel like they could be independent. They know everything. They're somewhat invincible.

And so what you do as you set more conditions, especially around driving for 16-year-olds, which is exactly what we're saying now, is that they notch it up a little bit. They take the risk. They're willing to be a little bit more rebellious and just push the envelope a little bit.

So what we're saying here is that, you know what? We're going to put more conditions on you, and you're going to follow these conditions, and if not, we're going to have all of these consequences.

pat

221

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Well, they're going to push the envelope. That's what they do. It's just the developmental stage that they're in.

I think that we as a Legislature, if we're really seriously concerned, then we may have to look at whether or not they're at the developmental and maturity stage where they actually at 16, in this time and age, should actually be behind the wheel of a car, and I don't believe they should.

So I'm voting no. I just want to make sure that it's not an issue of not saying I don't support the goals here and the objectives to keep kids safe. I just think that we're actually putting so many conditions that what's going to happen is more than likely that 16- or 17-year-old is going to violate one of these conditions, and that's exactly what's probably going to happen.

We're going to put them more at risk of violating the law. If they're more at risk for violating the law and they may lose their license for a year or 18 months, what in effect we've done is, we've actually raised the driving age to 18, 18-1/2, 19, 19-1/2.

pat

222

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

So what you do is, you've got a 17-year-old, violates the law. Gets license suspended for 18 months. Now that person may be 19 years old, in college, and cannot have a driver's license because we have all these conditions, the number of passengers, the time of day.

I really believe that we should look at raising the age to 17, learner's permit for the first six months, and then just leave the conditions and the responsibilities once they reach 17-1/2 to the parents to monitor, and that's why I'm voting no, not because of the attempt to try to keep kids safe.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Thank you, Representative Green. Representative Larry Miller.

REP. MILLER: (122nd)

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have some comments about the bill. I do intend to support it.

Prior to this bill, our youngsters would take a six-week course in high school, they'd get their license. Next thing you know they're on the roads,

pat

223

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

some of the most congested roads in the country here in Connecticut. They get on the turnpike and they automatically become speedway drivers because that's what's happening on that road.

Eighty-four, it's just incredible the way we drive in this state, and our teenagers get on that road with a new license, and they become just like us.

I think this bill goes a long way in giving them a lot more time behind the wheel, the 40 hours. I think that's a big improvement.

The fact that they could lose their license, that there's fines, that their parents are more involved, that's all very good stuff and will help to make them better drivers.

I know when I was a younger man and had my children turning 15, I'd get them behind the wheel, even though I was working one or two jobs. If I had to pick them up from school, they drove home.

If I had to take them to basketball practice, they drove. It was football practice, or baseball, to the gym, to the library, wherever they were going, it

pat

224

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

was no imposition on my part to put them behind the wheel so they drove all the way home.

Sometimes in the evening, sometimes in the rain, sometimes in the fog, sometimes during the day, but they were exposed to various conditions of driving, and I think it made them better drivers for that.

And I don't think this is the greatest Bill in the world, but it's a good Bill, and I commend those people that worked on it.

I think it will go a long way. If the young people know they're going to have that threat of a loss of a license.

I know when I was a young man, two important dates were when I got my driver's license, and when I could go out drinking. Those were two very important things in my life, and I think that still holds true today.

The kids want to get their license when they're 16 and they can't wait to become legal so they could go out to a bar and have a glass of beer, I hope.

But I think it's a good Bill. I plan to support it, and I hope everybody else does.

pat

225

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

So thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Thank you, Representative Miller. Representative Toni Walker.

REP. WALKER: (93rd)

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would like to pose a couple of questions to the proponent of the amendment.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Guerrero, prepare yourself, please.

REP. WALKER: (93rd)

In the discussions, and I've heard people talking about it, in the discussions that you had in the Committee, did you discuss raising the age for teenagers to acquire a license?

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Through you, Madam Speaker, yes, we did.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Walker.

pat

226

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

REP. WALKER: (93rd)

Thank you, Madam Speaker, through you, what were the oppositions to raising the age of an adolescent getting a driver's license?

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Through you, Madam Speaker, that's a very good question. Through our public hearing on the Transportation Committee, Representative, it was the psychologists that testified, and doctors that said that the brain development of a 16-year-old or 17-year-old, even an 18-year-old is basically the same, and that's why we said raising the age to 17 would have no significance in regard to 16.

To truly get a true appreciation of the brain in its full development you would have to be almost 21 to 25, and that was the information that was related to us. Through you, Madam Speaker.

REP. WALKER: (93rd)

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the gentleman for his answer.

pat

227

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

I also rise against the bill. I agree with several of my colleagues that mentioned, that talked about the fact that the concerns are that a 16-year-old is not capable of understanding or reasoning.

If you remember many of the discussions that we had when we were talking about raise the age were just based on that, that a 16- and a 17-year-old just don't have the ability to do reasoning.

When they gave an example, one of the examples they asked 16- and 17-year-olds about the idea, if they had the option to swim with sharks, would they? And they said that the children actually sat and thought about it for a moment because they could not understand the reason.

That is part of the problem. Our children at 16 and 17 really don't have the ability to understand when they push the envelope, and I feel that that's one of the biggest concerns.

When you talk about giving children licenses and abilities to actually participate as an adult, we still have not given them all the support that is necessary.

pat

228

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

I remember when I was 16 and I had to go through driver's ed, I went through driver's ed and then I had to go through a program in my high school that had to go along with it. So therefore, it took more than just the training, the driver's ed training, in order for me to get that license.

The other question that I have is, are these violations that we're adding just other ways of getting kids caught into the judicial system, which is something that we definitely need to look at and address.

And the other question I have is about the fact that parents are now going to be required to do two hours with the child, where parents are now struggling so hard to try and make ends meet day by day with multiple jobs. Here we are adding on two more things for them to have to do.

So I think the idea is appropriate. I think we do need to do something about our teenage drivers, but I just don't believe that just creating more violations is going to get that best result.

pat

229

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

I think that many people got up and said some interesting comments today in this debate, and one of the most interesting was the fact that they said that it's very hard to legislative behavior.

I wish we had thought about that back in January when we were doing some debating, but this is another time and another place.

So I think this is a good time for us to exercise the understanding that when we create laws, that we have consequences and sometimes we can't exactly understand those consequences that have a far-reaching effect.

If we were interested in raising the age to 17-1/2 as Representative Green said, I would definitely support it. But at 16, with all the violations, I'm concerned that we're just opening up another avenue for children to get caught into a correctional system, so I will be opposing it. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Will you remark further on the amendment before us? Will you remark further on the amendment before us? Representative McCrory.

pat

230

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

REP. MCCRORY: (7th)

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just have one question for the proponent of the amendment.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Please proceed, Sir.

REP. MCCRORY: (7th)

Thank you. My question is, what happens if the parent or the guardian of the child do not hold a valid driver's license themselves, how would that individual be able to obtain a driver's license? If that question was asked earlier, I apologize for not hearing it.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Guerrero.

REP. GUERRERA: (29th)

Through you, Madam Speaker, as long as it's a parent or legal guardian, it's not necessary to have a license to attend the class.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative McCrory.

REP. MCCRORY: (7th)

Thank you very much.

pat

231

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Will you remark further on the amendment before us? Will you remark further on the amendment before us? If not, let me try your minds.

All those in favor please signify by saying Aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Those opposed, Nay. The Ayes have it. The amendment is passed.

Will you remark further on the amendment, which is now the bill? If not, will staff and guests please come to the Well of the House. The machine will be opened.

CLERK:

The House of Representatives is voting by Roll Call. Members to the Chamber.

The House is voting by Roll Call. Members to the Chamber, please.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

pat

232

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Have all the Members voted? Have all the Members voted? Please check the board to make sure your vote is accurately cast.

If so, the machine will be locked and the Clerk will take the tally.

The Clerk will announce the tally.

CLERK:

House Bill Number 5748, as amended by House Amendment Schedule "A".

Total Number Voting	142
Necessary for Passage	72
Those voting Yea	109
Those voting Nay	33
Those absent and not voting	9

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

The bill as amended is passed.

Will the House come back to order, please. We're not finished yet, folks.

Representative Donovan, for what purpose do you rise, Sir.

REP. DONOVAN: (84th)

pat

233

House of Representatives

April 9, 2008

Madam Speaker, I move for suspension of the rules
for immediate transmittal of the last item to the
Senate for further action.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

The Majority Leader is requesting suspension of
the rules for immediate transmission to the Senate.

Is there any objection?

Hearing none, so ordered.

Representative Michael Christ.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar Number 218.

CLERK:

On Page 1, Calendar Number 218, House Bill Number
5909, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ELIMINATION OF TIME LIMITS
FOR TRANSITIONAL INDIVIDUALS IN THE STATE-ADMINISTERED
GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, Favorable Report of the
Committee on Human Services.

DEPUTY SPEAKER FRITZ:

Representative Michael Christ.

REP. CHRIST: (11th)

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we'll
now be voting on the Consent Calendar for today, which

JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS

TRANS-
PORTATION

PART 4
880-1156

2008

7

jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you very much for your testimony, Representative. We appreciate it. Thank you, Art. Representative Scribner.

REP. SCRIBNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Representative Cafero, for taking the time to bring this proposal forward to the committee today.

It is certainly a very worthy initiative that I know has very broad support. I'm very proud to be part of the caucus that brought it here.

It certainly is not only a worthy, intended effort, but it's a very efficient proposal as to how to bring it forward and deliver it to the public. So I thank you for that.

REP. CAFERO: Thank you, Representative.

REP. GUERRERA: Any other questions? Thank you, Representative, for your testimony.

REP. CAFERO: Thank you very much [inaudible].

REP. GUERRERA: Next on the list we have Senator Caligiuri. Is he here?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

REP. GUERRERA: Good morning, Senator.

SEN. CALIGIURI: Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Chairman DeFronzo, Ranking Member Scribner and Senator Nickerson, Honorable Members of the Committee.

HB 5748

For the record, my name is Sam Caligiuri. I'm a State Senator representing the 16th Senatorial District, comprising Southington, Wolcott, parts of Waterbury and parts of Cheshire.

I'm here this morning to testify in favor of Raised House Bill 5748, AN ACT CONCERNING TEENAGE DRIVERS.

And let me begin by saying that although I am fortunate enough to be early in the lineup to speak, I want to give credit, publicly, to State Representative Corky Mazurek, with whom I share the responsibility of representing the Town of Wolcott.

As you know, Wolcott was one of the, unfortunately, many towns, during the course of this year and in recent years, that suffered a tragic loss of teen drivers.

It really brought home the importance and the absolute need for tightening restrictions on teen drivers.

And I will tell you that Representative Mazurek, who's taken a terrific lead on this issue and this General Assembly and in Wolcott, has been a pleasure to work with.

And I'm looking forward to continuing to work with him and other Members of the Committee to see that we get something accomplished this year.

I think it's probably a truism at this point that we need to do something to increase

restrictions and do other things to help make teen drivers safe.

And I believe that this bill is worthy of our support because it does a number of things to take us in that direction.

I'd like to take a moment to highlight a number of the provisions that I think are very worthwhile and that identify two issues that Representative Mazurek and I have been talking about that's not reflected in the current bill that I would hope this committee will consider further, as it does more of its work on this issue.

First of all, Section 10 of the bill gives police officers the opportunity to seize the driver's license of a teen driver under certain circumstances.

That's something that became clear as something we ought to do as a result of the town meeting that Representative Mazurek held in Wolcott several months ago, and which a number of us had the opportunity to attend.

And I'm going to let Representative Mazurek talk more about the feedback he got from the Wolcott police department, underscoring the importance of allowing this change to go forward.

Beyond that, I think the provisions in the bill that increase training hours for teens, which requires parents or guardians to be involved in driver education, the increased time

10
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

restrictions when it comes to teens and their ability to transport others, the various increases in penalties, including the suspensions provisions in Section 8 are all things that I believe we need to do to help keep our teen drivers safer.

It's obviously that our teens are getting into more trouble and have a harder time staying safe than any other demographic group when it comes to driving.

And, as a result, we need restrictions and changes like the ones being proposed in this bill in order to help keep them and others safer. Let me just quickly raise, as I close, two other issues for your consideration.

One of the issues Representative Mazurek and I have talked about is the need to change the definition of reckless driving, which is currently defined as driving in excess of 85 miles per hour.

In the experience of law enforcement officers that we've spoken with, they believe that if you're driving 25 miles over a posted speed limit that that also should be considered reckless driving. We would commend that to your consideration.

And, finally, one other issue that Representative Mazurek and I have been working on is the idea that if you're a teen driver, and you're caught drinking and driving, you ought to lose your driver's license.

11
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

Number one, you shouldn't be drinking, but the combination of drinking and driving, especially for teens, is an absolutely lethal one, and we ought to have a zero tolerance policy when it comes to teens who drink and drive.

And I would commend to your consideration as well. Having said that, I thank you very much for this bill.

I support it, and I look forward to answering any questions that you might have and in working with you and others to see that we pass some sensible changes this year. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

REP. GUERRERA: Senator, thank you for your testimony. Senator, just a couple observations that I've seen over the last year or two years. Obviously, there is a huge impact out there in regards to our teens and driving.

It seems like every month now we're reading more and more that there's a fatal crash out there, in regard to our teens and the lives that we've lost already.

As you know, a few years back, the leadership, I have to say, from Representative Scribner, in regards to the graduated license, was one way we were trying to, you know, help in regards to less accidents on the roads and so forth.

One part about, and, by the way, let me just say, Representative Mazurek has been a leader on this, who has always been calling us in regards to what we can do, and I do appreciate

12
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

that. I'm sure Representative Mazurek will be up here shortly.

But one, some of the concerns I have about this bill, and when I say concerns is that it's imperative, it's imperative that we teach our children at a younger age about the impact of driving.

And I haven't seen that addressed yet. And I know that my good Senator DeFronzo and I have talked about this, and we know it's a short session.

But it, you know, we teach our kids at a young age not to do drugs, not to smoke, the impact it would have on their bodies and their life, but we wait until a teenager is 16, 16-1/2 before they get behind a motor vehicle and drive a piece of machinery that could kill themselves, let alone someone else on a roadway.

And I think it's up to us to push at the local boards and maybe some type of legislation that we have some programs in the schools at an earlier age, whether it's middle school going right up to high school, the impacts of driving with people in your car, the impacts with kids in the car, and the impacts with alcohol in the car.

And I don't think that message is getting out there. And I applaud this committee. I applaud the legislative body so that we're doing that, and the Governor's taskforce, which has done a fantastic job.

13
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

But I think that's just one part of this puzzle that needs to be addressed, and I'm hoping that maybe there will be a way, in this session, if not, hopefully, within the next session, that we address that. Any comments on that, Senator?

SEN. CALIGIURI: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I agree with you, and I would note that I think this bill takes a step in that direction. My recollection is, earlier on in the bill, we increased the training hours from 20 to 40.

I would also point out that in Section 11, Lines 411 through 420, there's a requirement that the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles shall amend its regulations as it comes to driver education and the like.

And that may be a starting point. If we don't think it's being done adequately, perhaps that's a section in the bill where we can make some modifications to further specify what changes would need to be made in order to achieve what you're talking about, Chairman Guerrero.

I think, to the extent that we could have a scared straight program for teen drivers, that put the fear of God into them because that's what they need in order to fully appreciate the magnitude of what they can do to themselves and others when they get behind the wheel, I would support.

14
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

REP. GUERRERA: And I mean going even through the school systems itself, like I said, middle school, maybe once a month they show some type of a tape with the impacts of this.

And I think it's the key. I really do because, obviously, we've seen, with the teens and at a younger age, the more we address not to smoke and drugs, the more of an impact it has on the children.

And I think this is just one part that we lost out on that we need to put it back into place to prevent, maybe, accidents from happening at a younger age, by drilling it into these teens at an earlier age. I appreciate your testimony, and I'll send it over to Senator DeFronzo.

SEN. DEFRONZO: Welcome, Senator. Thank you for your testimony.

SEN. CALIGIURI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. DEFRONZO: I just wanted to go back. When you were talking about the proposal on reckless driving, I didn't quite catch the detail of it. Can you repeat it for me?

SEN. CALIGIURI: Yes, Sir. Currently, my recollection is, I don't have the law in front of me. The definition of reckless driving is driving at the rate of 85 miles an hour or greater, or in excess of 85 miles per hour.

What Representative Mazurek and I learned from talking to law enforcement in Wolcott and other

15
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

places is that we think it would be sensible to expand the definition of reckless driving to say that if you're driving 25 miles an hour over or greater over the posted speed limit that that should also be considered reckless driving.

Corky can speak to this, but I know the police, one of the top police officers in Wolcott was talking about a circumstance where a teen was speeding down Route 69 in Wolcott, not in excess of 85 miles an hour, but far in excess of the posted speed limit.

And that for purposes of that road, that was reckless driving. And, yet, you couldn't charge him with reckless driving because of the way the current definition is written.

SEN. DEFRONZO: Thank you. I understand that. And I just want to add that the bill before us is indeed a product of a bipartisan effort. As you can tell, having been a strong advocate of the [inaudible] for some time.

We blended the proposal from the Governor, proposals from Representative Mazurek and yourself and others. We gathered some of our own little twists to it.

And I think it's a very comprehensive bill, a very bipartisan bill, and I want to thank you and Representative Mazurek for your advocacy in support of this.

You know, we intend to fix the final pieces of this over the next day or so and plan to vote

16
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

it out of committee on Friday, in response to the Governor's call for quick action. So with that, I want to recognize Representative Mikutel for a question or two.

REP. MIKUTEL: Not so much a question, but just a comment on this whole issue. This is probably the most important piece of legislation before this body this session because passing an effective bill that restricts teen drivers, in my opinion, is going to save lives and cause a lot less harm on our highways.

I'm always troubled about a little blanket punishment because some teens have, I've talked to the teens in my high school, and the vast majority of young people, I believe, obey the law and want to obey the law.

But there's that certain percentage that don't, and, quite frankly, I don't know if any amount of education is going to turn the tide there. We've had drug education in our school systems for years, K through 12, K through high school.

And if you look at the statistics, the drug abuse has not decreased markedly. So this bill that we're proposing emphasizes more on the penalty side.

Do you think it's appropriate to emphasize the types of suspensions and penalties that we have being proposed?

SEN. CALIGIURI: Representative, I do, not to exclusion of greater education, as I indicated with Chairman Guerrera, but I do think that

17
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

penalties and stiffer penalties are appropriate for a number of reasons.

Number one because it could be a way of reinforcing important lessons to teen drivers who do violate the laws that there are serious consequences, and to, hopefully, have some additional deterrent effect to help kids who might otherwise do something wrong to not do wrong.

Beyond that, to the extent that these laws are enforced, and we take kids, the worst offenders, off the roads for a period of time, we may, actually, during the time that they're off the roads, be keeping other people safer.

And if we can coordinate that with greater education, I think it is appropriate to increase penalties, Representative. I think it's got to be part of a comprehensive package to try to make teens safer, and I think it's a sensible component to a plan.

REP. MIKUTEL: Well.

SEN. CALIGIURI: I hope I've answered your question.

REP. MIKUTEL: Yes. You have. And I think that nothing gets the attention of a teenager than the fact that he or she could lose her license because that's a very important part of their young life.

I think now is the time. We tend to do things incrementally up here. Previous years, we

18
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

placed restrictions on the hours that they could drive, who could drive with them.

So I think that this is the logical extension of that because the statistics don't lie. I mean, there is a problem with young, teenage drivers, and there's something very dangerous with teenagers 16 and 17 driving, especially driving with other passengers and driving at night.

So I want to thank you for your leadership in this area, and I know this is somebody who's going to be doing something on this area. Thank you.

SEN. CALIGIURI: Thank you, Representative. I believe that too.

SEN. GUGLIELMO: Thank you, Representative Mikutel. Representative Scribner, followed by Representative Sawyer, followed by Representative Nicastro and then Representative Morin. Welcome to the Transportation Committee.

REP. SCRIBNER: Well, it's quite a start. Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Representatives and Chairmen.

I, certainly, want to commend you for, first and foremost, taking the time to come here today delivering this significant and important message, and to thank you for your advocacy on a very serious issue, one that has been in place for many years.

Over a number of years, I have been very involved on this issue and had an opportunity to do some level of research in regard to that. And, as you know, we have several restrictions in place, currently, in state statute.

I would tell you that those restrictions that are currently in place, which are modeled after the national model, were each levels of compromise in order to gain the support necessary to put them into place.

And we understand that there is always going to be opportunity to do more. Certainly, recent events have elevated the level of public concern and support for implementing stricter laws.

I do share some level of concern, having been involved in this issue for a number of years, as to what kind of impact it has on all teenagers.

And I think that as we monitor the effectiveness of our current law, we can identify in many, if not most cases, that the current laws were often not being abided by when tragic and fatal accidents have occurred.

And so my interest and concern remains how do we do a better job in enforcing the laws, regardless of what those laws might be?

And I think that a lot of the language that comes forward in the proposals that we've seen during this session seems to place a heavier emphasis on more strict elements that include

20
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

suspension, include much greater levels of required supervised training.

Some of this in strong support of, what has been your experience in, as you had done your research, as far as do you agree that there needs to be a stronger level of enforcement action, not only by law enforcement that rely heavily upon, but others, including parents, who, from my own observation, have not necessarily been cooperative in helping to support and enforce the laws that we've already put into place?

SEN. CALIGIURI: Well, Representative, the answer to that is yes, but that underscores the difficulty we face in just about every issue where we impose penalties, And, on a certain level, assume that there will be enforcement.

And I don't know, after a point, how to make parents who aren't doing their jobs when it comes to keeping their kids safer who are behind the wheel, to get them to do that.

I don't know how to do that because there's a point after which I don't believe this General Assembly has a reach, at least not effectively.

But, and, perhaps, one of the things that we ought to do, to the extent that we haven't done it yet, is to talk with police and talk with the schools about what we can do to make it easier for them to do enforcement. I will tell you this, and this is very much to Representative Mazurek's credit.

21
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

The provision in here, the Section 10 provision, that talks about giving a police officer the opportunity to seize a license is something that would actually help the police better enforce the laws, and help keep people safer.

It's a new power, but it's something that a police office can utilize to immediately change a situation by taking someone off the road who, perhaps, shouldn't be, based on their conduct.

And I think that kind of a tool could actually make it easier, or let me put it differently, can help law enforcement do effective job, a more effective job keeping kids safer.

You know, you describe the problem that we face in many aspects of areas where we legislate, and I don't have the perfect answer to that. Ideally, you would have strict penalties and appropriately strict penalties, but you'd also have perfect enforcement.

And I don't know how to get there. I mean, we still drive down the road and see people talking on their handheld cell phones. We see enforcement problems everywhere.

But to Representative Mikutel's point, I think we have a moral obligation, notwithstanding our imperfect ability to enforce, to do everything we can on the books to help keep the kids safer.

And I think the kids of restrictions we're talking about would help us to do that.

REP. SCRIBNER: I thank you for your answer, and I agree with your response. I do think that it's important, as we go through this process, that we take the opportunity to use this to send a message to the public that we serve, which is we need the active support of those that are involved, beyond the laws that are implemented, to ensure not only that the teenagers, who are the least-experienced drivers on our roadways, are safe, but to protect the safety of everyone that travels our roadways.

Because in often cases, it's not just the teenage driver themselves that is affected by some of the things we're trying to improve here.

We often see innocent victims that lose their lives or are severely injured at the hands of an inexperienced driver, who may not be abiding by the laws.

We must rely upon the active involvement and awareness of parents, of others that have the opportunity to influence. I would not go as far as to suggest that we should ever expect our law enforcement to profile every young-looking driver that's behind the wheel on our roads.

And, yet, we, somehow, need to find a way to provide them with the resources needed to, in some way, help improve upon the enforcement side of whatever laws we ultimately pass to provide that safety measure. Thank you.

23
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

SEN. CALIGIURI: Thank you, Sir.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you, Representative Scribner. And just to touch upon Representative Scribner's point too. The parents need, obviously, to take a bigger role in all this too, Senator.

And that is, you know, you know your child better than all of us in this room. You know whether they should be driving at 16 or 17, whether they should have one passenger or 2 passengers.

As my daughter, when it was Christmastime, was able to have more than one or two passengers, I would only allow to have one passenger for two or three months before she'd have another passenger in the car.

Just understand what the impact is when you have another person in the car talking to you or having a conversation, that's what happens.

Kids get indulged in these conversations, and, next thing you know, they're not looking at the road. They're looking at their friends right next to them. And we all need to have a bigger role in this.

SEN. CALIGIURI: Yes, Sir. I agree. And I'll just point out that one of the good things in the bill is the provision towards the end where parents have to be involved in a couple of hours of training. I think that takes us in the direction that you're describing, Mr. Chairman.

24
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

REP. GUERRERA: Yes. And so many times too, through these public hearings that we've had, and parents still don't understand what the laws are in regards to teens driving. And I think that's a good point. Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You give reference to the fact that the bill talks about increasing the hours from 20 to 40 hours of instruction.

And one of the things we did not touch in this particular bill is the length of time that a student driver would be a permittee. And, presently, it is four months if you go have instruction, and it is six months if you do not purchase instruction.

Do you have a feeling on increasing that? If you were going to increase the instruction hours to 40 hours, should they be increasing the length of time that student should be a permittee, a driver with a permit, so increasing from four months?

SEN. CALIGIURI: Representative Sawyer, I think this is the type of issue where there are so many different ways that we can achieve the objective that we all want to achieve, that there's just no one path to that point.

And I think what you suggest is worthy of additional consideration. It's not something I've thought about in any real detail, so it's hard for me to comment beyond that.

25
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

But I think this is clearly an example of a situation where we have a lot of different roads that we can take to get to the ultimate destination we're all trying to reach.

And I think what you're suggesting could be one of those ways. And it sounds like a good idea, but I haven't had the opportunity to really think about it in any real detail, Representative.

REP. SAWYER: Thank you, Senator. I appreciate your thoughts on that because we know that, certainly, six months is only two driving seasons, you know, and students have so much to learn.

And I'm one of those advocates that thinks that almost we should be looking at a yearlong permit process. Thank you.

SEN. CALIGIURI: Thank you, Representative.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you, Representative Sawyer. Representative Nicastro.

REP. NICASTRO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Senator. Good afternoon, Senator. I beg your pardon. You know, no bill is perfect. It never is. It always need to be expanded and modified.

But we need a starting point here, and I think what Representative Mazurek has done here, to bring this forth to all of us, is a fantastic idea.

26
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

Number one, we had that, as you all know, we had that session up in Wolcott. I think one of the most important things that came out of that session is that we had the young kids themselves telling us that, yes. Something's got to be done.

And it needs to be done for their protection. You know, 16 to 17 year olds say to us up there, why are you being so strict? Why are you being so mean?

It's not that we're being mean. It's that we love you. We care about you. We want you to succeed in life. We don't want to see you laid out in the center of a road, like we've seen in Bristol and in Wolcott and down at the other end of the state.

We have the final report on that Bristol accident, where we had a couple of 16-year-olds killed, a 17-year-old killed, and, I believe, an 18-year-old or 20.

They were doing well over 100 miles, close to an hour, closer to 140 miles an hour, 140. It seems impossible, but it's true.

The day of the Wolcott funeral, it was in Bristol that we clocked that gentleman coming down Route 69, 106 miles an hour. Why? There's no need for it. You're not going to get somewhere any faster.

More importantly, I think the key here is, and Representative [inaudible] giving that officer

27
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

a chance to pull that license, giving him the chance to pull that license.

We do it for DWI, and it keeps them off the road. If that officer had that tool so he could take that license, and then the next day that gentleman's got to, the young person's got to come in with his or her parents, and bring their parents, and they'll get the message.

We need to send a strong message that we care about our future, and those are our children. And up until now we haven't been able to do it. I think this bill, while not completely perfect, is a major step in the right direction.

We have to take a look at what's being done, the slaughter on the highways, the innocent people that are being hurt, such as in Bristol, the couple that were hurt, you know, through that accident, minding their own business.

And we see that everywhere. And it's time we took a tough, strong stance on this and sent a message. We're not going to tolerate this any further.

I appreciate your support on this, Representative Mazurek, most certainly, and anybody else that had anything else to do with this.

I served as a youth officer for the school system for 17 years in Bristol, and I can tell you that that was a great learning experience.

28
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

But more importantly, here we have the chance now to prevent slaughter on the highways.

And if we save just one life, one life, it's worth our time and our effort. Because if we don't do something, this slaughter's going to continue on. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Senator.

SEN. CALIGIURI: Thank you, Representative. And, just for the record, you know, you were part of that forum that Representative Mazurek organized in Wolcott.

You also stood with us in that bipartisan press conference we held announcing some of these reforms, including the provision we're talking about on having a police officer be able to yank someone's license on the spot.

And I just want to thank you, Representative, for the work that you've done on this issue, and I'm looking forward to continuing to work with you and others.

REP. NICASTRO: Thank you, Senator. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Representative Castro. Representative Morin, followed by Representative Fox.

REP. MORIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Senator, nice to see you.

SEN. CALIGIURI: Likewise.

REP. MORIN: Appreciate the work that you and Representative Mazurek and others have put

29
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

forth. I've, we talked how you haven't been in this position yet. You're family's young.

I just survived. I have a 20- and a 22-year-old, but I have a 14-year-old coming up. So anyone that has children and has read some of the terrible things that have happened in recent history can respect this bill.

One question I have, and I didn't see it in here. I know when we were discussing with some of the medical people here, there were some restrictions as far as time, when younger drivers can drive. Is that in here?

SEN. CALIGIURI: I don't believe there's a time restriction in the bill, as I recall.

REP. MORIN: Do you remember if you were talking about 10:00 at one time?

SEN. CALIGIURI: No. I don't believe a change to the time restrictions, to the extent they exist, are in here.

REP. MORIN: Okay. That's terrific. Something I would be looking for.

SEN. CALIGIURI: But there are restrictions, Representative, on extending the length of time during which a teen driver is not permitted to drive with any other person, except, perhaps, a parent or guardian. So there is that type of additional restriction in there.

REP. MORIN: If you can answer for me, Representative Scribner, I'd be happy to.

30
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

REP. GUERRERA: Representative Scribner.

REP. SCRIBNER: Thank you. I do believe that the time, the curfew, is addressed in there. Current law is 12:00, with specified exceptions.

The original proposal from the Governor's taskforce was to move that to 10:00. It was moved, then to 11:00, which is in the current proposal.

REP. MORIN: In this one? Excuse me.

REP. SCRIBNER: Yes. What it does is reduce the current restriction from 12:00 midnight to 11:00 p.m.

REP. MORIN: And, I guess, on that I'm just going to say I've, we all love our kids. I love my kids more than anything. But I think one thing that concerns me, when we put limits like this, my daughters played high school basketball.

One of the great things, on a Friday night, for them, was to be able to go with their friends, sit down, watch a movie, have a pizza. And with legislating that they have to be home, they can't drive, by 11:00, we're taking away the roles of a parent.

I was responsible for my children. I cared about them. But now they'll be breaking the law. It's after a basketball game, and they get out, and their coach yells at them if they

31
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

lost, and they get to their friends house at 10:00, watch a movie, have a pizza.

If they don't leave by 11:00, they're breaking the law. And I wholeheartedly support this bill because it does a tremendous amount of good.

But I think, sometimes, we are taking away the roles of parents and responsible people. And that part does concern me. That certainly is not going to make me vote against it, Senator, but I would, I don't know if you can even understand where I'm coming from.

But I think we do have a lot of great, 99% responsible young people that really are going to be, if they do break the law, are going to be being taken away from an opportunity that we all enjoyed growing up, which is camaraderie and responsibility. But thank you for your work. I appreciate that.

SEN. CALIGIURI: You're welcome.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you for those comments, Representative Morin. Representative Fox.

REP. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon, Senator. I also was able to participate in the Wolcott public forum, and I thank Representative Mazurek for inviting me to be part of that.

The stories that we heard from the family members and from the kids who lost their friends were really heartbreaking. And the

32
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

courage that they showed and how they came forward as a means that they wanted to help, you know, it wasn't anger.

It was what can we do to help? We don't want this to happen again. And it was very inspiring, the work that they did and the confidence that they showed in us, to try to work with them to get something done.

And I'm pleased to see this bill here today. I know that there are some issues that are still going to need to be worked through. And one of the major elements in these accidents, I think, when you look at, especially, 16- to 17-year-olds is the speeding.

Even more so than drinking, having the opportunity to drive a car that you're not used to driving, and then you drive it too fast, and you miss a turn, you're distracted by people with you in the car, you're distracted by lane changes, you don't know where you're going, there's a number of, when you're operating at these levels of speed, that's when most of the accidents occurred.

I think that was a lot of what we heard during that public forum. One of the, I know that this provision or Section 10 incorporates this provision regarding suspending the license immediately with the police officer and taking the license.

And I think part of that came about because what you can see is a 16-year-old or somebody who's approaching 17 could get a reckless

33
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

driving charge against them, and then the court can kick that case around for over, you know, over a year.

So that kid's driving the whole time they're 17 years old, and you really have this kid out on the road, and they really have not suffered any punishment until, ultimately, the court case is resolved.

I recognize, though, that there are some questions as to a hearing element that should be part of this. And I think it may involve more of a per se administrative-type hearing through DMV that is expedited, similar the way we do with the DUIs.

And I think that that might be an opportunity that would maybe meet both of these needs. You know, you can suspend the license on an expedited fashion, while the court case is still ongoing.

And I think so long as there's some sort of a hearing mechanism in there, I think we can, maybe, see both of the goals here.

It's my understanding, the way the DUI statute works, is that you do lose your license for 24 hours immediately. That is seized by the police officer. And I think we can do something there, along those lines.

I know that, in addition to Wolcott and Bristol, many of us here have lost young people. I know my friends here from Stamford, you know, in our area, we have lost people,

34
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

even since the hearing that took place in early December. So I do think this is something we can do this session. So thank you.

SEN. CALIGIURI: Thank you, Sir.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you, Representative Fox. Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you, Senator Caligiuri, for your testimony.

SEN. CALIGIURI: Thank you, and thank you very much for the questions and the opportunity to be here today.

REP. GUERRERA: We're going to have David Hicks. Is David here? Yes, followed by Commissioner Peter O'Meara.

DAVID HICKS: Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thanks for this opportunity. My name is David Hicks. I'm the Chairman of the New Haven Commission on Disabilities, representing people with disabilities in New Haven.

I am here to speak strongly in favor of Senate Bill 499, concerning parking for persons with disabilities. Senate Bill 499 is a very timely bill.

In 2000, the current statute, Public Act 00169, implemented the issuance of disability parking permits without expiration, making Connecticut one of only four states issuing such lifetime permits.

47

jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony.

DAVID HICKS: Thank you.

REP. GUERRERA: Next we have Representative Mazurek, followed by Commissioner Peter O'Meara.

REP. MAZUREK: Okay. Are we all set? Chairman Guerrero, Chairman DeFronzo, I thank you very much for allowing this opportunity to come up and speak on House Bill 5748.

I welcome all you ladies and gentlemen. We thank you for your kind attention. With me, I have Dana Drysdale. Dana was the sister of Thamara Correa, who was killed in the Wolcott crash several months ago.

I have Tom and Debbie Lehmann with me. Debbie spent ten weeks in the hospital as a result of the Bristol crash that, unfortunately, killed four young people in that town.

And I have with me Mike Bosco. Mike was the best friend of Anthony Apruzzese, who was the driver of the Wolcott crash. And we're all here to testify in favor of House Bill 5748.

If you look at all of the crashes that recently occurred in Connecticut, and I think the number that comes to mind is we've now had five of them, starting with Bristol and ending with the most recent one down in Orange, there's a deadly combination that has shown through in

48
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

all three accidents, and that's young drivers, excessive speed and passengers in the vehicle.

It just happens that that's a deadly combination that we keep seeing over and over. And we're angry and we're frustrated by what's going on in the State of Connecticut.

I think we're frustrated by the fact that we can't do anything to solve these young, needless deaths, and we're angry at these young people for putting their families and their friends and everyone else through such great pain.

We held a hearing in Wolcott, as a result of the Wolcott crash. And the citizens of Wolcott came out. We had a town hall meeting. And they made it very clear that they wanted to see some changes in the state motor vehicle laws.

One of the things that we spoke about was the reckless driving statute. The reckless driving statute is currently defined as being in excess of 85 miles an hour.

Eighty-five miles an hour on the highway is fast, but eighty-five miles an hour, in Wolcott, on Main Street, is supersonic.

We'd like to see that addressed, and we'd like to see a limit somewhere around 20 miles an hour over the posted speed limit would also be considered reckless driving.

When I spoke to the Wolcott Police Department, they were extremely frustrated by the fact that

they knew this young driver in Wolcott was on a road to a very serious problem.

And I asked them why they didn't do anything about it. Why didn't you take his license away from him? And they said they were frustrated because they couldn't take their license away.

I said you could take a senior citizen's license, and they said, yes. That's true. By regulation, from the Department of Motor Vehicle, we can take a senior citizen license on the spot, give that license to the Department of Motor Vehicle, and they have to go get it back from DMV.

We don't allow the police department to have the same opportunity in dealing with these young drivers. And that's what we're asking for. I think the police department should be able to seize, on the spot, the driver's license of a 16- or 17-year-old, maybe even an 18-year old.

Maybe we need to go to the point where they're still in high school, and a police officer can take the license, on the spot, if he tickets a driver for reckless driving, for drag racing, passenger restriction, DUI or failure to take a DUI test.

Now I know there's also criminal sanctions, and I think those criminal sanctions should continue to stay in place. But I think that we've got to give our police department an additional tool to get these kids to stand down just a little bit.

-0
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

I'm not after all 16-year-old drivers and saying we should change the age to 17 or 18. I don't believe in that. I don't think that will help. I think eight out of ten are very good drivers.

But I do think that we should address those two out of ten who are tearing up our roads, who are disregarding our motor vehicles laws and who have no respect for the people and the passengers we have around us.

So I ask you to consider this bill favorably, and, hopefully, we can go forward. I would like to get some statements out of the people who have been kind enough to come with us today, and I guess we'll start with you, Dana.

REP. GUERRERA: Dana. Come up. Debbie, go right ahead, Debbie.

DEBORAH LEHMANN: Okay. Good afternoon. I'm here, HB 5748 basically, to let you people know that I've gone through an awful lot--

REP. GUERRERA: Debbie, can you just, please, just state your name?

DEBORAH LEHMANN: Debbie Lehmann, Deborah. It's been very hard, ten weeks that I was in the hospital, and not only did I suffer but my family.

It's been a very hard time, but I've also felt bad for the four kids that got killed in our accident. But the drag racing that that

51
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

gentleman was doing that night was uncalled for, and it's got to be looked after because too many people are getting killed.

These kids, they just don't know when to stop. They think it's a big, fun thing. And, you know, a car is not a toy, and these kids don't realize this.

And something's got to be done real soon because I hate to see anybody else get hurt that's not necessary. And it's just very upsetting, not only for me, but for other people that have had a hard time.

And it's changed my life for the rest of my life, and it's hard. And I don't know what to do about it, and that's why I'm here to help. Because I'll put my two cents down because it's worth a heck of a lot more.

And I hope that everybody else can see what's happened. I appreciate it, and I hope that we can do something to help these kids. Thank you.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you, Debbie, for coming in and testifying.

DANA DRYSDALE: My name is Dana Drysdale. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for letting me be here today. On October, please excuse me. On October 4, 2007, I lost my sister, Thamara Correa, in a traffic automobile accident.

My sister's school was cancelled for the day, and she was on her way to a friend's house at 8:15 in the morning. She was riding with her girlfriend, Jessica, in a car driven by Jessica's brother.

He was a 17-year-old, with a habit of speeding and dangerous driving. He displayed some of his stunts on his Internet site, as well as the streets of our Town of Wolcott.

He had previous tickets, accidents and a reckless driving charge, but like most other teenagers, thought he was invincible. We came face to face that day with just how fragile young lives can be.

All three teens lost their lives in that accident, with a great deal of fault landing squarely on the shoulders of that young driver. For her safety, my sister was not supposed to be in a car with anyone under 18 years old.

But on that day, she chose to test her limits. I will never forgive myself for not asking her before I left for work that morning who she was driving with, as I did every other day.

But the kind soul that she was, she just looked at it as just getting a quick ride to a friend's house. She was very respectful and not one to break the rules, but I never thought that one hasty decision would bring about burying my baby sister.

She was a happy, energetic 15-year-old, with a smile that could melt your heart. She was

loved by those around her, and very trusting. She was held in a very high regard by her classmates, teachers and school administrators.

But the ones that loved her most were the babies. Her young nieces and nephews were truly privileged to have her in their lives. As many of us wake every day with a broken heart after losing Thamara, these children are left with a great hole in their lives that was once filled with love and attention.

I feel that as adults we have the responsibility to protect our children and the impact our children have on our society. As a special education teacher and a mother, I know that children make impulsive decisions, on a daily basis, that have significant consequences.

I believe that one of the roles of our Legislature is to implement tougher guidelines on young drivers so they begin to clearly understand what can result as a consequence of their actions.

I know that I will never get my sister back, nor fully understand why this had to happen to such a young girl. I also don't know how to explain to my five-year-old son, nieces, and nephews how a boy that had already broken so many rules was allowed to drive again.

I am not saying that a license should be taken away and never given back, but I believe driving is a privilege and needs to be treated that way.

54
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

When a child is behind the wheel of a car, the potential for dangerous situations are very real. How ready are these children to handle the possibility, and look, I'm sorry, to handle and possibly be in charge of these situations?

I believe we need to teach our children how to have responsibility with a car. I believe we need to look at other states, such as New York, New Jersey and, recently, Massachusetts, where they have implemented stricter rules for first-time drivers.

Gradually giving a young driver privileges will hopefully help them understand the responsibility they are taking on.

When a one-year-old starts to walk, we do not just put them down and walk away. We stand with them and walk with them to protect them, and watch for dangerous situations, as they learn to be safe and manage on their own.

I believe that if this boy driving the car my sister was in followed the stricter rules set by this bill, he would not have had a license that day.

I know some parents have a hard time saying no or setting limits, and many teens, as we know, like to break their parents' rules. So it is up to the lawmakers to step in and foresee dangerous situations, isn't it?

I ask, on behalf of my family, my friends, myself, our friends, my son, nieces and

55
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

nephews, all who will never see Thamara Correa again, do not make her death just another statistic. Please, make a change.

And in relation to what Representative Guerrero said, you expressed that we need to start implementing things at a younger age. I can guarantee that I know of at least eight children that have been affected by this tragic loss. Thank you.

MIKE BOSCO: Hi. My name is Mike Bosco. I'm here to speak on behalf of the new driving law. On October 4, 2007, my best friend, Anthony Apruzzese, was killed in a car accident on Route 322, in Wolcott. HB5748

He was the driver, as well as his younger sister, Jessica, and her best friend, Thamara, were also killed. I'm 18 years old now. I was 17 at the time.

While other kids my age were psyched about going to college and planning their futures, I was crying and mourning. Anthony should have never had his license, due to a past DUI incident on March 31, back in 2007.

He got into an accident, was unconscious at the scene, and they brought him to the hospital. They had no choice but to draw blood from him to see his alcohol level.

Because of the loophole in the present law, he only got three months of losing his license instead of six. If he had six, he'd still be here today. He wouldn't be dead.

When I got my license, I was nowhere near the maturity level to have it. I didn't know what I was doing, always in a rush, you know? Nor did I have the experience.

I was with a driving instructor for eight hours on the road. Four of it was parking. So I was on the road for four hours, and I still got my license. I wasn't ready.

It seems like every day, when we turn on the news, there's another kid that's dead. Things are the way they used to be. You know, there's more kids now, more cars on the road, and, worst of all, cars are faster now.

I read the proposed bill, and I agree with it. Sometimes it's worth to go the extra mile to make things safe. I don't want anyone to have to go through what I went through.

It's something that I'll never get over. That's why I think that we need a change in this present law. It's up to you guys to do it.

You know, you've got to close all the open doors. You guys got to be the parents of the parents. You guys got to protect us kids, you know?

When Ant died, my father told me something. He said that some good has to come out of this. Something positive has to be changed or something good has to come out of this tragedy.

57
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

There's always something good that comes out of a tragedy. And I think this bill is that positive.

You know, something that will ensure the safety of teenagers, as well as everyone else on the road, you know, make it safe and not just a race track, an actual road to drive on for transportation, not for speeding, not for horsing around, not for drinking and driving, not for partying, for driving, transportation, what it's meant for.

So I'll leave you on a quote. It says that if you save one life, it is as if you have saved the world. So that one life that we save, as a result of this law, may one day be someone that has saved the world. Thank you all for letting me speak. I appreciate it.

REP. MAZUREK: Mr. Chairman, I thank you, and I thank the committee. We have a few people here, hopefully, who have spoken for some of the true victims of these senseless tragedies that have occurred recently in Connecticut.

I'll be happy to answer any questions that I can. I know Senator Caligiuri, my good friend, took a lot of the heat for me in getting up first, but I'll be happy to answer any questions I could for the committee.

REP. GUERRERA: Well, thank you, Representative Mazurek. And my deepest condolence to all of you. And, obviously, we never can understand the pain that you're going through.

58
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

And I will agree that sometimes it takes a tragedy to do something here. And we will try to do something to prevent, otherwise it would be lost. That I promise you. Representative Mikutel.

REP. MIKUTEL: Yes. To follow up with what the Chairman said, unfortunately, it takes too many tragedies and this situation for us to enact the kind of laws that you're seeking.

I want to emphasize your point. Driving, I think someone said driving is a privilege and not a right. And, therefore, we certainly have the right to place greater restrictions on those who are going to abuse their driving privileges.

It's unfortunate. Young people are going to make mistakes. But when they make a mistake, and they're young, and they're in that car, that may be the last mistake they make.

And it's, we, as lawmakers, ought to give them the opportunity to survive their mistakes. And we're not really doing that in the teen drivers.

So I think the best way to sent the message to these teenagers is to hit them with some stiff penalties. Because they're not going to listen to the talk. The talk has been out there for a long period of time.

When you start hitting them and suspending their licenses when they violate a curfew, when they violate the rule on passengers in cars,

59
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

when you take their license away for a year because they are driving under the influence, they will get the message.

They spread that message within days. So thank you. I'm tired of hearing the testimony of people who have lost loved ones. We've heard it over the years.

And it's time that we just act so that we don't have to hear that kind of testimony again. I know it's troublesome and hard for you to do that.

But it really, really is time for us to act. It works in Massachusetts. The tougher legislation has reduced the fatalities. Let's just thank you for your testimony.

Hopefully, this will be the last time we need to bring that kind of testimony before us. Thank you.

REP. GUERRERA: Representative Scribner, followed by Representative Davis.

REP. SCRIBNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Representative. First, I want to thank you for your advocacy on this very significant and important issue, and commend you for drawing a lot of support and public attention for the Legislature to take further initiatives.

One of the things that I touched on earlier with Senator Caligiuri is my concern. Over the last seven years or so, the state did implement

60
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

what is referred to as a graduated driver's license program.

And current statute has three components of the program and national model in place. It is clear to me, from monitoring this issue so closely, that we've not done a good job about enforcing the laws that are in place.

And I have concerns about no matter how we broaden that and to what extent, how do we go about improving that? And I'm sure that's been part of your process in analyzing this and bringing the measures forward.

I wish that I had your passion and advocacy at the point in time that I was trying to get current law passed here in the Legislature. But as others have mentioned, Connecticut happens to be a land of steady habits, and we tend to do things in steps as opposed to leaps.

And it is regrettable that it is often significant loss and pain that is closely felt by family members and community members that elevates those concerns to where they need to be.

Do you have any thoughts about some of the things that have been discussed, including the Governor's taskforce, in regard to our ability to better enforce the laws, regardless of what extent they may become?

REP. MAZUREK: I think, personally, the thing that frustrated me, and I mentioned it previously, Representative, is the fact that there was no

61
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

immediacy to the penalty for violating any of our laws.

The day after we held the public hearing in Wolcott, the police department told me that they pulled over two separate cars that had passengers in them illegally.

And they called the parents. One parent hung up on them. The other parent said why didn't you give my kid a break? You should have just given him a warning.

And I think that's the mentality that we're faced with here. I think it's up to us that we have to legislate some of these penalties. It has to be immediate.

I can absolutely guarantee that if Lieutenant Angiolillo, Captain Angiolillo, takes someone's license, that within 20 minutes, everyone in the high school will know.

Watch out. Angiolillo's got so-and-so's license because he caught him with passengers or reckless driving or drag racing on the street. And that's why I think we have to have some immediacy to the penalty for these young people.

They need to know that if they're going to the prom tomorrow night, they may be asking someone else for a ride to the prom because their driver's license is going to be in the police chief's pocket.

62
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

REP. SCRIBNER: I appreciate that response. And I think it is an important aspect to the overall issue to draw a higher level of attention to because it is and always has been one of our greatest obstacles in trying to prevent additional fatalities or serious injury in accidents involving teens.

Our expectation has not been strong enough, has not been significant enough. And I think, therefore, it is broadly disregarded, even though it is law.

I find that very regrettable. I think my preference would be that we not need to impose these laws. I would hope that parents would take a level of responsibility and discipline that would establish them as quote, unquote house rules or law.

I think our efforts have been to steer it in the right direction. And, regrettably, we've had far too many fatalities that have caused great pain that have elevated that to another level. But thank you for your time and attention to this major issue.

REP. MAZUREK: Thank you.

REP. GUERRERA: Representative Davis.

REP. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I represent two of the communities that recently lost young people, both Milford and Orange.

63
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

I have a close attachment to Amity High School, where the two students who recently passed away, 27 years coaching there. My wife, who, herself, is rehabbing from a serious car accident, is a teacher there and senior class advisor.

And I can't tell you what it's putting here through, the time she's spending on the telephone. I'd like to thank you, Representative Mazurek, for your work on this.

And I'd like to thank you people for coming and telling us your stories and extend our condolences to you. It took a great deal of courage.

Senator Caligiuri mentioned education. And while I agree that, certainly, we need to enforce our laws strictly and make sure that the laws meet our requirements, many programs that we have that have been successful involve a tremendous amount of education.

And I don't know if you can answer this, but I know one of our superintendents, Milford, Dr. Polansky, is here. I know you know him and have worked with him.

Maybe we can get some insight as to what we might do in the schools to educate our young people. I don't know if you'd be willing to come up and give us some sort of, if that would be okay with the Chair?

REP. GUERRERA: Do you want to come up? I'm sorry.

64
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

REP. DAVIS: Dr. Polansky is the Superintendent of Schools in Milford. He has recently gone through a situation. I was asking a question about education. And I know Representative Mazurek has worked with Dr. Polansky also.

REP. MAZUREK: Absolutely. Mr. Chairman, Dr. Polansky is a good friend of mine, and he has helped us out in wrestling with some of the proposals that we put forward.

And I had neglected to introduce him to the committee. And, with your indulgence, I would like him to speak on the education question that Representative Davis is asking.

REP. GUERRERA: And just, I don't mean out of any disrespect here, it's just that we have a list of people that are in front of us. I see Dr. Polansky's on that list.

If you would like, if you could just be brief. I mean, if you do it now then, unfortunately, you won't be able to talk later on Mr. Polansky. We are heading for session probably in the next five to ten minutes here.

DR. HARVEY POLANSKY: I'll talk as quickly as I can. Chairman Guerrero, Members of the Transportation Committee, I support the revisions to the bill, to House Bill 5748.

I represent superintendents across this state who live the nightmare of calling a parent to offer condolence, to create the logistics of sending kids to a funeral.

But I come to you today with two very different perspectives. Currently, I am the Superintendent at Milford, and I have a 16-year-old son, who, in two weeks, is going for his driver's test.

Three weeks ago, the Milford community faced horrific circumstances. Two of our own two students, sons, friends, colleagues, were killed in a deadly crash, with speed, at the Milford Post Mall.

We're still grieving over the loss and words can't speak to the heavy heart that we feel. I'm not here to discuss the merits of that crash.

I'm here to tell you that I've, unfortunately [inaudible] as superintendent in Southington, working with Sam, working with Corky and working with Representative Davis in Milford.

Yesterday, I spoke to Dr. John Brady, Superintendent at Amity. That's a bruised community. They're dealing with it. The facts are clear.

We know I can give you all the facts in the world. I put that in my testimony. I do believe that one, there needs to be an increase in the driving age, two, that there's no substitute for experience. The permit should be a year.

We have health classes where we can provide some of those online materials and/or in-class

66
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

materials. My son had to go take an eight-hour drug and alcohol course at an offsite facility.

We should be doing that in the schools. We should be the leaders and collaborating with the Department of Transportation and the Department of Motor Vehicles to provide, in our health classes, mandated coursework that we can handle.

The curriculum needs to be changed. The Department of Education knows about this tragedy, this epidemic. I don't want my son to die.

My son could be driving in two weeks, and I think I provided him the education and the experience, I think. Take that choice out of my hand. Mandate it.

From a Superintendent's standpoint, from a father's standpoint, I urge you to change the legislation. Thank you.

REP. GUERRERA: Dr. Polansky, just a few comments and maybe a couple of questions here. What are your thoughts about the education process, as I stated before and Representative Davis stated, that we start this program at an earlier age in the middle schools and having some films on that once a month to show the effects of alcohol and teenage driving or people in their car?

DR. HARVEY POLANSKY: Allstate, the Allstate Foundation is providing driving simulation

67
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

machines for Law High School, where this happened, in the fall.

We should have driver simulation machines in every single school. It's an expense, but there are many children who don't have the advantage of any parental support as relates to driving.

We have people who can't afford to send their kids to a driving school. We've got to provide some type of mechanism to catch all those kids.

I believe that there should be driver simulation machines in every school, that before you go for your permit, and the permit should be a full year.

My son hates me right now, but I think that driving, there's just no substitute for experience. We should collaborate, as a school system, to provide those mechanisms.

REP. GUERRERA: Well, Doctor, and I agree with you on many of those points. What about, now when I was a teenager, not that long ago--

DR. HARVEY POLANSKY: Don't flatter yourself.

REP. GUERRERA: --the schools used to have a driver-training program at the high schools. Many high schools had that. And it's funny because I was talking to my law enforcement officers about that. There was a good program. What happened? Why aren't those programs?

68
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

DR. HARVEY POLANSKY: They went the way of budget cuts, to be frank with you. They became a mechanism to pay as you play, if you will. Driver's educations are, for the most part now provided by private organizations in cooperation with schools.

It's a resource issue. I don't need to tell you that schools across the state are experiencing significant special ed no child left behind mandates.

In the triage of education, drivers ed plays second fiddle. There are mandates that we're paying for, so it's a resource issue.

REP. GUERRERA: It's a resource issue. Okay. But, again, it just seems as though we heard from Mike. Michael testified that there he was. Four hours was parking, and the other four hours was on the road.

And I remember in my high school days that I was on the road quite a bit, not only with the driver trainer, but my parents also.

DR. HARVEY POLANSKY: Not every kid has parents. Not every kid has a second car. We've got to make sure we catch all the kids. And I don't, even 17-1/2 as opposed to 18, fine.

But if the permit is now a year, and we have some kind of a driver simulation catchall at the schools, then we can make sure that the visual acuity and all of the driving skills that are necessary, at least they're caught and

69
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

captured and they're ongoing, so there is that collaboration.

REP. GUERRERA: All right. Thank you, Doctor. Any other questions? Thank you, all of you, for your testimony.

DR. HARVEY POLANSKY: Thank you very much.

REP. GUERRERA: Representative Mazurek, thank you for all that you've done on this, and, again, to your colleagues there, thank you for coming in and testifying. I know it was very difficult today.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. GUERRERA: Now we're going to have to go the public. I apologize. We went past the hour here. So we're going to have to rotate here, from the public to the elected officials.

So we will start with Marco Henry, then followed by Commissioner Peter O'Meara. Mr. Henry, I just want to caution you, as all speakers, that there is a three-minute limit. And due to the number of people, we're going to have to be pretty strict about it. Thank you.

MARCO HENRY: Good afternoon, Senator DeFronzo, Representative Guerrera and all the Members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Marco Henry. I'm President of The Yellow Cab Company.

(HB5746)

177
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

It's very helpful, particularly when we have to very different proposals before us on the same issue, to have that kind of information available for our consideration. We appreciate it. Thank you.

STEVEN HEBERT: Thank you.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you for your testimony. Senator Crisco, followed by Representative Hamm.

SEN. CRISCO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and outstanding Members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Senator Joe Crisco, representing the 17th Senatorial District.

I appear before you tonight not only as a Legislator, but also as a parent and a grandparent. I ask for your favorable treatment of House Bill 5748, AN ACT CONCERNING ~~TEENAGE DRIVING~~, most likely the concept.

I can't think of a more important issue that is before us this year than what we've been facing in many of our towns and communities.

But I want to be careful to state that this is not a knee-jerk reaction, but a reaction to a real life situation that is occurring more than ever before.

I don't see Representative Davis here, but Monday evening we just lost two young lives at Amity High School, two young lives that are wasted that should not have been wasted.

178
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

I ask that you look at the Massachusetts junior operating law, which has some very stiff penalties and driver restrictions and reeducation classes.

While I realize there's no perfect answer for addressing human behavior, but crafting the right language that will not penalize most of the responsible teenagers, but those who are not responsible.

I ask that you look at this and, hopefully, we can address the issues. We may not correct the problem 100%, but at least we could try. I also ask that you look at the issue of speed governors, not to sound too draconian.

Perhaps for first-year drivers, it should be required that any vehicle they drive has a governor in regards to speed. When you look at high school parking lot, for any of our towns and cities, you'll see a massive amount of horsepower out there.

And I think this is also a part of the problem. So I ask you, you know, for your addressing this issue, and I thank you for the time to express my opinion in regards to what I think is a very important issue to all of us.

REP. GUERRERA: Well, thank you, Senator, for staying because we know this is a very important issue for us to handle this session, and many of us here know that.

And we will tackle this, and, hopefully, we'll come out with a problem that will help save

179
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

lives, help save teen lives and everybody out on the roadways. Any questions for Senator Crisco? Thank you very much, Senator for waiting.

SEN. CRISCO: And let me close [inaudible] responsible adults too, but that's an issue for another day. But, basically, if we can address the teenage issue, I think that we will have fulfilled our hope of office. Thank you.

REP. GUERRERA: And Representative Davis did touch on the deaths in his district there. So thank you. Representative Hamm.

REP. HAMM: Good evening, Representative Guerrero and Senator DeFronzo and distinguished Members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Gail Hamm. I'm State Rep from the 34th, which includes East Hampton and Middletown.

And I am here to ask for your support of House Bill 5310, AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDS FOR THE REPAIR OF THE COMSTOCK COVERED BRIDGE IN EAST HAMPTON.

And I want you to know, I brought a prop. [inaudible - microphone not on] Now you might ask what's this historic bridge doing in the Transportation Committee? A good question.

The Comstock Covered Bridge, located in East Hampton, is on the boundary of East Hampton and Colchester. It is one of three remaining covered, timber bridges in the state.

188
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

get it right and make sure that these provisions are workable.

I had thought to comment specifically, but let me just tell that we are, in addition to the section-by-section comments that we've given you already, we are working on more detailed comments and also going over the language in these bills for any problems that we see.

And we will also submit that to you, by tomorrow, hopefully. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have, but I hesitate to get into specific areas because there are so many of them, including four or five that were discussed this morning.

And we support, and I think I just want to make clear that we support these bills, as we've indicated in our testimony, but we want to make sure that they come out right.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you, John. And I just want to say that we appreciate all the hard work that you do in regards to helping us understand many of these statutes and so forth, and the extreme work that that you were helpful on the taskforce and the Governor's taskforce, in order to get this teen driving bill passed along. We appreciate [inaudible].

HB 5748
HB 5043

JOHN YACAVONE: Oh, absolutely.

REP. GUERRERA: No. You've been, obviously, a great asset to this Transportation Committee. John, one question today that I want to touch upon, and that was with the placards.

SB 499

JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS

TRANSPORTATION

PART 5
1157-1445

2008

281
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

REP. FAHRBACH: And we have had, I don't recall ever hearing about them here in Connecticut. Are they not involved?

HOWARD NASBAUM: Well, they're international.

REP. FAHRBACH: Well, that means all over.

HOWARD NASBAUM: Yes. But they deal with the national borders, basically, and there's I don't know why they're not heard of here. But they, customs, itself, goes to meetings, works with them as well.

REP. FAHRBACH: Okay. Thank you.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you. Any other questions? Thank you. Dr. Bunk.

DR. BARBARA BUNK: Chairmen Guerrero and DeFronzo, and Members of the Transportation Committee, I am Dr. Barbara Bunk, psychologist, Co-Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Connecticut Psychological Association, and I'm the mother of a teenage driver.

I'm speaking to you tonight regarding House Bill 5748, AN ACT CONCERNING TEENAGE DRIVERS. CPA applauds your efforts to improve the safety of the state to create legislation that will protect our youngest drivers, through a strong graduated driver's license.

We support the spirit of this bill, and I'm here tonight to offer you some comments for your consideration.

282
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

Research demonstrates that graduated driver's licenses can and do effectively reduce the rate of crashes for teen drivers, especially for the newest and youngest drivers.

While we do know some of the important facets of the GDL, the optimal parameters are not yet obvious to us.

There are a great variety of programs across the nations, though the most effective include a lengthy learning period, often with certification requirements, night driving restrictions and passenger restrictions.

The adolescent mind is a unique entity. Only recently have we learned that the brain is really under construction and doesn't reach its maturity until we are between 20 and 25 years of age.

In fact, the area of the brain that is less mature happens to be the most influential in decision making, judging, knowing right from wrong, differentiating good from bad, all of the organizing in what we call the executive functioning, organizing sophisticated information.

In addition, this same area, which is called the prefrontal cortex also relates to one's ability to make social decisions, suppress impulses and think of other people at the same time as I'm thinking of myself.

283
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

These are, of course, the cognitive skills most important for safe driving. This is not to say that the 16-year-olds cannot learn to make good decisions about the complex task of driving, but rather to point out that such learning will not come easily to the adolescent.

It could also point toward licensing adolescents older than 16 years. The learning of a complex skill, such as driving, is multifaceted, and experience is the best teacher. We know this.

Developing expertise takes time, practice, understanding of the goal, practice and more practice. It involves thinking, seeing, acting in a deliberate manner so that responses [Gap in testimony. Changing from Tape 4B to Tape 5A.]

--to situations become automatic. It also involves being able and willing to regulate one's emotional reactions during times of stress.

An extended learning period is absolutely necessary for the young driver. While 40 to 50 hours is the norm in GDLs in the U.S., according to the National Safety Council, two jurisdictions actually require 80 hours of practice driving prior to licensure, and one actually requires 100 hours.

In Connecticut, I would suggest why not err on the side of caution and require even more than the 40 hours as written currently into this bill?

284
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

Finally, I will say it is clear that adolescence is a time when peers are important, and the present rendition of House Bill 5748 entirely restricts peers as passengers for 12 months.

In some ways, this restriction might be inviting noncompliance. On the other hand, it is also true that parents and community are essential to the teen.

The single most influential factor for the development of resilience in children or adolescents or adults, resilience, which is the adaptability in the face of stress, is a meaningful relationship to a person or community.

Therefore, compliance would likely be enhanced if legislation involved an adult in some integral way.

For example, a requirement that a parent or parent surrogate be formally educated about the risk factors as part of a driver education or requiring a contract, which is being done in some places across the country, between the teen and the parent, could be integrated into our bill.

Overall compliance with each facet of the GDL would likely be enhanced by a meaningful adult involvement. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I'd be happy to answer questions.

285
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you, Dr. Bunk, for waiting all this time in regards to this very, very important issue when it comes to teen driving. And I have a few questions, and, hopefully, you can answer them.

And that is there has been a lot of debate in this Chamber and in this committee about whether we should raise the driving age. Some have stated we should go from 16 to 17, even up to 18.

And I was just wondering if you have any statistics that show the difference between a 16-year-old compared to a 17-year-old or 17 to 18 in regards to the brain activity, if there's any difference in regards that would make them a better driver.

Or is it, as we've come to find out, more of an experience that the longer they're behind the wheel, and so forth, obviously, makes them a better driver?

DR. BARBARA BUNK: Actually, I did try to look for some data regarding that. And, of course, as you probably know, having looked at the crash data regarding adolescents, there's some conflict about whether 16-year-olds get in more crashes or 17-year-olds do.

And the data in the brain functioning, as well, is kind of lumped, as opposed to separated per year. Now that's because development takes place not unilaterally, but it's a unique situation for each of us.

286
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

So what I would say though, Chairman, is that, as you pointed out from my testimony that, and your finding out, that, really, the notion of practicing, of having more and more experience in a very low-risk situation, which, of course, being supervised is the lowest of risks, is really our best support.

Along with that because we know that brain maturity doesn't actually reach its culmination until age 25 or so, 20 to 25, and then because we also know that puberty is a time when adolescents are actually, their brains and hormones are pushing them to seek stimulation.

So I would say that, as a psychologist, that the older adolescent would make for a safer driver, just generally speaking.

REP. GUERRERA: Okay. Would you say though, a 16-year-old, in regards to development of the brain though, is there any difference from a 16- to a 17-year-old in regards to their cognitive decision-making?

DR. BARBARA BUNK: As I look specifically, to try to discern at what age we could do it, we could say I really didn't find any specific data. But I would respond with the generality that the experience.

And then, of course, I would also add, in my last paragraph, the last point that I made, which is about the relationship and the family connection that an adolescent has.

287
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

And, of course, what happens it they are pushing, teenagers are pushing us away. But, in fact, they really need, just like a toddler really needs to have a safe, support, secure place before he or she can move out into the world, adolescents need the same thing.

So I would say that if we have, if we could kind of build the foundation, then the 16-year-old, with the same amount of practice, might be able to utilize, to perform similarly to an 18-year-old, but without the same kind of practice and the same community support group.

REP. GUERRERA: It's funny. Representative Scribner and I were talking about that and he said, basically, the same thing you just stated. But what about the educational process, doctor?

We talk about, at a younger age, if we start to tell them more about the effects of driving and so forth. Do you see that has a bigger impact on these children?

Like as I stated before, about the drugs and no smoking at an early age, if, as parents and as a school system, the more they teach them at a younger age, the more they'll be less likely, maybe, to be less involved in an accident because they're understanding what they're getting themselves into?

DR. BARBARA BUNK: Absolutely. I would say that that not only makes common sense, but is certainly borne out that when a young child is, what do I want to say, exposed to data and situations when it touches one personally, I'm

288
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

a little saddened to say that when my own son was beginning to drive, I really didn't have an idea of him, even being an educated and resourceful person, didn't really look at things like these statistics.

But what happened was one of the crashes, the fatal crashes this summer, personally touched a colleague and employee of mine, and so it came to my attention in a big-time way just how dramatic the statistics are about teenage drivers and the need for simulated experience.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you, doctor. I know that we've met before, and you came into my office, and we talked about this. And it has been a big help for me. And I'm sure Members of the Transportation Committee may call on you in the future in regards to some of this information.

It's been a big help. And obviously, as we go along to implement these new teen laws, I think that not only will we do something this year, but I think, even in the future, we may look to do something in regards to even strengthening it even more.

DR. BARBARA BUNK: Great.

REP. GUERRERA: Senator DeFronzo, do you have any comments?

SEN. DEFRONZO: I have [inaudible - microphone not on] did you submit testimony?

DR. BARBARA BUNK: Yes. I did.

289
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

SEN. DEFRONZO: I have not been able to locate your testimony, and I would very much like to have a copy of it. But if you submitted it, I'm sure we have it. Thank you.

DR. BARBARA BUNK: Okay.

REP. GUERRERA: Representative Scribner.

REP. SCRIBNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for taking the time and a long time, at that, to be with us.

I really appreciate what you've offered, which is perhaps a different element of what we really need to understand better and consider, as we consider any improvements, enhancements, or changes to the laws, which are all in an effort to provide a higher level of safety and, particularly, to our youngest and least-experienced drivers.

DR. BARBARA BUNK: Yes.

REP. SCRIBNER: One of the things that you touched on in your response to Chairman Guerrero has to do with something that he alluded to and we've discussed, which is many have advocated the potential of increasing the age.

And I do understand that there are developmental differences between the age of 16 and 18, for instance. And every individual is different. It's not only associated by age, necessarily.

290
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

But one of the concerns that I have, in looking at that as a potential change is that you take that young person out of the supervised element of a support mechanism, and, typically, parents, who do bear some level of responsibility and influence over them, not only legally, as them being minors, but also the greater opportunity for them to participate in guidance and direction and supervision as they are going through this learning phase.

If it were to be raised to an age of 18, for example, suddenly, they are likely to be away from home, outside of that environment, and they're still inexperienced.

So they may be two years old, but they're no more experienced than they would have been when they started the process at 16.

So I do think it's important for us, as we're considering some pretty significant proposals as far as change goes, that we do hear from educated people like yourself, who bring in a different perspective, not only about what we read and see in the headlines in the aftermath of a very unfortunate tragedy, but it's really to help us make some broader and more sensible decisions on what will work best to provide a higher element of safety. So I really do appreciate your being here and taking the time to offer that to us.

DR. BARBARA BUNK: You're very welcome. I think your point is, actually, a very good one, that without the support of the family, when the 18-year-old is moving off to college, we kind

291
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

of lose the opportunity to provide that network, that support network.

Naturally, as I was looking to come here this evening, I did see that there seems to be, there was reported in some of the, and I will check to see exactly where it is, but there was reported that there's a trend in the country for teens to delay getting their driver's licenses.

And I wonder if there's been any or if there could be some research and investigation into that, even when we have, they have the opportunity to get it at 16, it seems that a greater percentage of teens are now putting off getting it until later.

REP. SCRIBNER: It's interesting that you'd point that out, and I've heard people, as we've considered some of the proposals that have been out there and now before us, that people have offered that, that there may not be the same anxiousness by newly acquired 16-year-olds to pursue obtaining their license right away.

I know when I turned 16, the first thing I did was get to the motor vehicle department that day to apply for my license. And within 30 days, I had it in hand. That was decades ago, but I think that same sense of excitement hasn't necessarily dissipated for many.

But is also think that what we're really trying to do here is provide a sensible and yet safer opportunity for all of our youngest and

292
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

inexperienced drivers to learn in a more risk-free environment.

And it is a complex issue. I don't think anyone started out trying to make it punitive. As a matter of fact, the measures that are in place in current law were negotiated and compromised to avoid that.

We wanted to keep the privilege in place, allow all of our young people to have that opportunity to get their license, but kind of learn, in a gradual way, until they have free reign behind the wheel.

Hopefully, with that time in place, they would have a greater level of experience and also self-confidence, which is, I think is a big part of it. Thank you.

DR. BARBARA BUNK: Yes. Yes. Well, I can speak for a long time, but I thank you.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you, Representative Scribner. Any other? Representative Jutila.

REP. JUTILA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, I want to say that Representative Scribner beat what I thought was the record that I owned. I turned 16 on April 16 and had my license on May 17. So you got me by one day. I won't bother mentioning--

REP. SCRIBNER: That was last year?

REP. JUTILA: yeah. I was going to say, I won't bother mentioning what year that was. Thank

293
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

you, Doctor, for your testimony. You gave us a lot to think about by applying the knowledge base of your discipline to this.

And a couple of the things that I heard kind of specific proposals that came out of your testimony were increasing the amount of hours that would be required for driver training.

You mentioned three other jurisdictions that have much longer periods of time. And another thing that was not quite as clear to me was the required parental involvement.

And I was wondering, first of all, if I don't recall you mentioning other jurisdictions that have done something with that. Maybe that's a novel concept. And I'd like you to comment on that.

And then could you tell me if your Legislative Committee has tried to actually tried to formulate any of this into actual language that we could consider for future inclusion in the bill?

DR. BARBARA BUNK: I can certainly address all three of those points, the third being that we haven't, as yet, but we'd be happy to attempt to.

In regards to the parental involvement, there, I'm not exactly sure if it's ever been written into law.

But I do know that there are several jurisdictions who are reporting now developing

294
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

contracts between that they actually implement in a driver's education course, so that a contract between the teen and the parent about what's going to happen if you stay out late beyond curfew, you know, you don't have anybody other than one passenger in the car.

Whatever the family comes up with, I wasn't, there are some published on the Net, so it gives you some kind of a basis for what you might do.

And my thought was that if we could incorporate, perhaps, a required number of hours for educating parents in the driver's ed course itself, and/or to have them certify, as they do now, about that we had our kids out and on the road for this many hours or that many hours.

But, really, to give them the statistics, the kind of risk factors, to show them the differences between 16 and 18 and what happens when the high-risk times, not only nighttime, but also before and after school seem to be high-risk times for 16- and 17-year-olds to be involved in accidents, which makes absolute sense to us.

But most parents wouldn't really know that, unless we found some formal way of teaching them. So I think that would be, oh, the other thing I suggested was perhaps was, I guess I already said that, about integrating parents into driver's education.

295
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

And, yet, in regards to your first point, I really, I think the more experience we give to the adolescents behind the wheel, the better, so that 40 hours is a great improvement over 20.

But 50 or 60 or 80, in those jurisdictions, would be better. Experience is definitely the best teacher for a complex task.

REP. JUTILA: Thank you very much.

DR. BARBARA BUNK: You're welcome, Sir.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you, Representative Jutila. Any other questions? Thank you, Dr. Bunk. It was very informative.

DR. BARBARA BUNK: Thank you.

MICHAEL COMMISA: Good evening Chairperson, Chairman DeFronzo and Chairman Guerrera. My name is Michael Commisa. I am the Director of Safety for the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers also known by our acronym, AIAM.

AIAM is a trade association representing 14 motor vehicle manufacturers, who account for over 40% of all light-duty vehicles produced annually in the United States.

I'd like to thank the committee for this opportunity to participate in this hearing to discuss Senate Bill 503, and the important issue of driver distraction from video displays in motor vehicles.

315
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

JACK SOUSA: Good evening, Honorable Senator DeFronzo, Representative Guerrera, Ranking Member Scribner and other Members of this Committee.

My name is Jack Sousa. I represent the Driving School Association of Connecticut, and I'm also a driving school owner here in the State of Connecticut.

I've submitted written testimony, so I'll keep my remarks brief. But I would like to direct my comments towards Raised House Bill 5748. We support many part of this legislation.

We support the strengthening of penalties, the extension of the restrictive period, once an applicant has his license, the seatbelt requirements for all occupants of the vehicle, parental involvement, and, of course, empowering the police department, on major violations, to be able to seize licenses.

But, honestly, this legislation represents more of the same. I've been coming before this committee since 1996. And we've taken, in Connecticut, what I would estimate is a band-aid approach.

There's a rash of accidents. We respond with what we think will work. Six to eight months later, we're back here. In this building, I've heard comments about has happened and transpired in Massachusetts with their new junior operator license legislation.

316
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

There's members in the building, there's Representatives from the Department of Motor Vehicle, and even Representatives from our industry that want to steal parts of that legislation, if you will, cherry pick, and apply what happens here in Connecticut.

That legislation is effective because what they've done is not just representative of what's happening in Massachusetts, but in many states.

They have taken what the federal government describes, what the good doctor a few speakers before me described, as graduated licensing. Graduated licensing, there are no silver bullets.

This piece of legislation has a huge imbalance. It's geared totally towards the punitive end. Let's punish kids. There's a lot of good kids, a lot of good drivers, at young ages, that never get into trouble versus the educational component.

An effective program has to be comprehensive. You have to have an educational component. There has to be parental involvement, and then, yes, the punitive, for those that deserve that.

This calls for 40 hours more of supervised training with a parent. Forty hours of what? Are parents the best people to be doing this training? What qualifications do they have?

Not only that. Are these the same parents, who all of us have witnessed, have turned their

317
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

faces on the penalties that exist now? The penalties that exist now have not been effective. There's validation.

In our business, I paid for a state license. My instructors have to be paid and licensed. I have to purchase equipment. My books are audited. You need to know. The state knows when, how, when, where, and what car a student was trained in.

Parents have no validation. They sign a paper. There's no request. There's no dates, time, nothing, no cars that are used. It's just based on their signature.

The National Highway Transportation Highway Safety Administration, it's testimony in Congress in 2000, the Subcommittee on Ground Transportation said there's no silver bullets.

There has to be a comprehensive approach. The states that have had the greatest success have all three components. So what I ask of you is to take a second look at this bill.

If you want the success that Michigan, Massachusetts, Virginia and 38 other states have had, then take the steps that are necessary.

So I'm not sure that doing what's politically right will be effective. So I'm asking you to look at their numbers. Look at their decreases in crashes, incidents of injury, and do what they have done.

318
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

We'll enjoy the same success. If this bill is drafted as written, six to eight months later, we'll be here talking about what we can do now. I'm open to questions.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you, Jack. Any questions?

REP. SCRIBNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Jack, for your testimony. Thank you for having the patience to be here these many hours.

I've had an opportunity to work with you over the years in trying to address the issue of teen driving and safety issues, consequences, unfortunate and regrettable tragedies that have plagued Connecticut over the years.

It's not something new. It's something that has been there, historically. I believe that we have made efforts and tried to address the issue over the years.

But I do tend to agree with you that we've somewhat taken a band-aid approach, that we've, through compromise and our interest to do something constructive, we've done less than perhaps what we should have.

And I also agree I think some of what has been carefully considered and brought forward in the form of a proposal may not be complete, may not address all of the real issues that need to be addressed.

And it would be my preference that we take a very comprehensive approach, which may start with educating younger people, before they

319
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

become 16, may include, as you've testified, higher degrees of not only encouragement, but requirement for there to be supervisory or parental involvement.

One of the things I did want to ask you about, and you made some reference to specific states that have had, perhaps, more proven success with what they've implemented, Michigan being an example, can you just offer a little bit of detail in that regard as to what some of those things are that are not included and what we currently have in-law for what's been proposed before us?

JACK SOUSA: Sure. Well, it varies from state to state, but, clearly, there's a professional, educational component. There, clearly, is required, parental involvement and validation of their involvement, in terms of the time they spend behind the wheel with their son or daughter.

In addition to that, there's the penalty phase. And other states have demonstrated, states like Michigan, who have, if you will, the poster child style of legislation, starts training at a very young age.

The allow students to begin training at 14, although they can't get a license until 16 and 6 months. And there's three levels. There's three levels that they have to be able to acquire.

Satisfactory training, satisfactory restrictive period, there's several levels that they have

320
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

to achieve. And it's proven. You know, their numbers speak for themselves.

In addition to that, Maryland's another major, major state that has passed graduated licensing as proposed by NITSA, and has huge success. In terms of in their first year, in their first year, they have over 32% reduction in incidence of injury and fatality. That's a huge number.

I've pulled the numbers, the data that Connecticut has available, and Representative Guerrero asked a question to the doctor in regards to moving it to 17.

And if you look at the data that's available through the pressure groupings in Trumbull, you'll see that it had little effect. I am going to say one thing.

Each and every year, since 1996, we've added some piece of what we have today, this present law. And every time we raise the age, prior, students could start training at 15 and ten months, we moved it to 16 they couldn't start training.

There was no permit. We placed a permit. Every single time we've added these add-ons, the incidence of injury and accident have just moved in that age category.

So by raising the age, by requiring a longer wait period, by increasing the restrictive period, has not proven successful in the past. I say it, and I say it over and over.

321
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

If we all feel, and we all walk through the holes here, and are very proud and admire the success that states like Massachusetts have, in order for us to have that success, we have to do the same thing. It's proven. It's proven.

And just since September of this past year, Massachusetts' reduction of accidents and fatalities is over 30%. And the bill's very young.

REP. SCRIBNER: Thank you.

JACK SOUSA: You're welcome.

REP. GUERRERA: Senator DeFronzo.

SEN. DEFRONZO: Jack, thank you for your testimony. What I wanted to, I want to be clear about what it is you're suggesting. So, specifically, now the Massachusetts model or the Michigan model, specifically, what it is, what is it that you are suggesting needs to be done?

JACK SOUSA: I'm suggesting that A, there has to be a required educational component. We have something in Connecticut that no other state in the country has, and that is this [inaudible] that's all that's mandated in Connecticut.

And, by the way, 45% to 47% of all new teens licensed between 16 and 17 in Connecticut go through this program, and that is the eight-hour drug and alcohol safe driving practices program. That is the only thing that is required.

322
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

So, specifically, I will say that we draft legislation very similar that requires professional training, requires validation of parental training, so that parents can supplement what's being done.

In addition to that, that parents have involvement in the program, that they spend a two-hour segment. And, in addition to that, that the applicants have a restrictive period after licensure. In addition to that, the penalty phase.

So then the kids that are bad kids, if you will, or get themselves in trouble, not bad kids, but get themselves in trouble, they're punished, and the other kids, who develop good driving skills and abilities, are not.

SEN. DEFRONZO: See, but the fundamental differences in the proposals is, see, I mean, you would prefer to eliminate the parental option that we have in Connecticut now for training, and require a full-blown professionalized training, supplemented by--

JACK SOUSA: Supplemented by the parental involvement, and I'd want validation of the parental involvement, not just a [inaudible].

SEN. DEFRONZO: Yeah. But I'm correct in that [inaudible].

JACK SOUSA: Yes, Sir.

SEN. DEFRONZO: Well, and I think that this raises an issue. And I don't know. I can't remember

323
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

now how many states now allow parental. Maybe you do. You probably do. And let me ask you, how many states do allow the parental option?

JACK SOUSA: As a sole option?

SEN. DEFRONZO: As we're doing in Connecticut, yes.

JACK SOUSA: I can tell you this. I don't want to quote the country. But there are no New England such states that allow just that sole parental training option.

SEN. DEFRONZO: So that option then would require, under this bill, 40 hours of supervised training, the 8-hour course that you mentioned, would require parental involvement, all the additional steps and penalties and so forth would all apply?

JACK SOUSA: Yes, Sir.

SEN. DEFRONZO: But your contention is that it would not be nearly as effective if we just terminated the parental option all together and flipped it all over into a professional program then?

JACK SOUSA: Absolutely. There's--

SEN. DEFRONZO: And I understand that. And you know very well that there are many, many people in this state that feel responsible parents can and should be given the opportunity to train their kids. And I think that's the dilemma we have.

324
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

So I object earlier, when you use the term political. I don't think that's an appropriate characterization of this. I think there's a legitimate disagreement on this issue, and it has to do with the fact that many parents want to train their kids.

And I would suggest the majority of them are responsible parents, can do a decent job. I do think we've got to get them more involved in the process, as you suggest, the parental involvement component, which really came out of our discussion. I want to thank you for that.

But I think we do have that difference of opinion here. And I don't know. I could be wrong, but as I read my fellow members of the Legislature, I don't know if we're quite ready to go as far as you're suggesting, although, you know, we might end up there. I don't know.

But I think that many of us feel that responsible parents should be given that option. And, you know, right now I think that's where we are. And that's why the bill doesn't go quite as far as you suggest. Thank you.

REP. GUERRERA: I mean, Jack, I have to agree with Senator DeFronzo on this too because I don't see it political. I mean, we're dealing with kids out there that are losing their lives, other people losing their lives.

This isn't a political situation here. We're trying to do what we feel is right. Now sometimes we don't always get it right. We

325
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

know that. Sometimes we come back to the drawing board and look at it again.

But when it's categorized as political, dealing with people's lives, in my opinion, is not political. Representative Janowski.

REP. JANOWSKI: Thank you. Just a quick question. This umbrella program that you're talking about, that you're suggesting, professional training, that you call it, what would be the average cost?

JACK SOUSA: I believe the state average is \$475.

REP. JANOWSKI: The state average is? What do you mean, the state average?

JACK SOUSA: In our association, we average what people are charging from all different parts of the state for that program.

REP. JANOWSKI: That's the driving school?

JACK SOUSA: That's correct.

REP. JANOWSKI: Okay. And your program would be around the same?

JACK SOUSA: Absolutely.

REP. JANOWSKI: The reason I ask that is that while it, can someone take a partial of your program? Can they combine, let's say, four weeks of training through your program instead of eight weeks, and the other training through parental

326
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

supervision? Because I remember doing that with my kids.

JACK SOUSA: Right now their option would be that they can take eight hours with the driving school, of classroom, and then the parent would have to give 22 hours of classroom supplemented, to get to 30, and then give 20 hours in the vehicle with their son or daughter. But, yes, they could do that.

REP. JANOWSKI: So they could do the full-blown thing. They could do partial of it, if a parent decided that their kid. Okay. I think I like the idea that parents do have more than I wouldn't want to mandate, let's say, that they have their kids go totally and only to professional driving school.

JACK SOUSA: I agree.

REP. JANOWSKI: But I understand your emphasis on the instruction.

JACK SOUSA: And please understand that I'm not saying that compulsory training is the silver bullet here. Other components, it has to be a comprehensive approach, are what is drawing the success to other states.

If you were to say if we're only going to have compulsory training, you're only going to have the punishment phase or the punitive phase that is now being proposed, as standalones, they're not.

327
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

And there have been millions of hours, millions of dollars expended by the federal government to document that.

REP. JANOWSKI: And I appreciate that. The reason I was asking the question was that not everybody can afford to send their kids to driving school.

So it would be a disadvantage to those families who can't afford the \$500 or whatever it is to be able to send their kids to driving school, and that would be a disadvantage to those children or those kids who, you know, it wouldn't be a level playing field for a lot of kids. Thank you.

REP. GUERRERA: Representative Scribner, followed by Representative Sawyer.

REP. SCRIBNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to take a step beyond Representative Janowski's questioning in regard to the cost factor associated with a certified driver training program, I think it's known that in completing such a program that there could potentially be offsetting financial benefits in regard to insurance discounts.

JACK SOUSA: Yes. Sure, there's still incentives.

REP. SCRIBNER: Would you agree with that?

JACK SOUSA: Absolutely.

328
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

REP. SCRIBNER: And do you have any kind of average or estimate on what that offsetting difference might be?

JACK SOUSA: It ranges. It's a minimum of 10% to a maximum of 20%. So it depends on the particular companies, but most are offering at 10%.

REP. SCRIBNER: Is it safe to believe they possibly could really get that cost factor back over a relatively short period of time in insurance?

JACK SOUSA: There's no question. No question. No question.

REP. SCRIBNER: Thank you.

JACK SOUSA: And other states have also examined the situation of students not being able to pay for. It's not new to Connecticut.

REP. GUERRERA: Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good evening. Having had two kids that I had to teach to drive and put through driving school and whatever, we had the good fortune of having the ability to take them out of state to an old family farm in Vermont, and they actually started driving at a much earlier age.

One was terrified and I said [inaudible] she never drives, which is fine. To me, that told me that she was really not ready at age 16. She [inaudible] she really didn't drive until she was almost 18. That's great.

329
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

The other child, however, was fascinated from the time she was about 12 or 13 and drove around on the farm, drove tractor, drove the old family Jeep, all of which is very legal up there, and, of course, they can drive at 15.

The interesting thing is, of course, is you know about their law up there, is that they get to drive the four seasons before they get their license.

We do not have that in the State of Connecticut. We have four months or six months. And we've had this debate. I've been on this committee. I've heard you before.

And I guess I would ask another time, what were the, if you had all the abilities in the world to be a dictator for a day, perhaps, and could write the law, how long would you have the permitting process?

JACK SOUSA: I would, I think six months is appropriate. Your point though, your example of what you've pointed out in regards to your own children, there are some kids that are very mature at 16 and can handle a car, and it's the right decision.

But it's not the decision for every single student. And I think that there's no more individuals on earth qualified to make that decision than parents.

330
jlm

TRANSPORTATION

March 5, 2008

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you, Representative. Any other questions? Thank you, Jack, for your testimony.

JACK SOUSA: Thank you.

REP. GUERRERA: Frank Leone.

FRANK LEONE: Senator DeFronzo, Representative Guerrera, distinguished Members of the Committee, I thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is Frank Leone, an employee of the Farmers Insurance Company.

I'd just like to read this statement. I'll make it brief. It's repetitive. House Bill 5742 restricts the sale of salvage to international buyers by requiring purchasers of salvage to have a valid license in Connecticut or another state.

Due to geographical and logistical barriers, international buyers are not likely or have the ability to obtain such a license. The result of House Bill 5742 would be to limit these purchasers out of the marketplace.

These international buyers are important to the marketplace because, nationwide, they comprise about 35% and 40% of all salvage purchased.

House Bill 5742 will ultimately harm Connecticut auto consumers because such restrictions limit the buyer competition at salvage auctions, thereby reducing the sales price of the salvaged vehicles for the small buyer base.

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
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State of Connecticut

*TESTIMONY OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
MARCH 5, 2008*

I appreciate the opportunity to support House Bill 5748, An Act Concerning Teenage Drivers.

As drivers, teenagers commonly lack maturity and skill. Their sense of invincibility and immortality inspires unwise risks. A series of tragic teen driving deaths over the past twelve months has dramatized anew the perils of teen driving, providing a clear call to action. Car crashes are the leading cause of death for young teens. For the safety of young teen drivers, as well as others with whom they share the roads, we need stricter driving restrictions.

This proposal:

- extends the nighttime teen driving limits to 11:00 p.m. from the current midnight,
- increases from three months to six months after receiving a limited driver's license for a teen to only have a parent or guardian as a passenger;
- allows only one additional passenger besides a parent or guardian during the time period from six months to one year after receiving a limited driver's license
- requires all passengers to wear seat belts
- doubles the required behind the wheel experience from 20 hours to 40 hours
- increases license suspension and fines for teen drivers

Following the enactment of a graduated driver's license for teenagers and passenger and nighttime driving limits, teen fatalities declined. Unfortunately, for the past four years, there has been little to no progress in averting teen driving deaths.

House Bill 5748 sends a strong message to teen drivers: obey the law or you will lose your driver's license. Tougher driving restrictions and more education are important. Just as critical are stiffer and surer penalties for teens who violate the law. Too many teen driving tragedies involve young people previously cited for speeding or drunk driving. These drivers should simply not be behind the wheel.

Extending the limits on passengers riding with teen drivers is very important. 54% of children passengers who died in car crashes were riding with a teen driver.

I urge the committee's favorable consideration of House Bill 5748.



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March 5, 2008

Representative Guerrero, Senator DeFronzo, and Members of the Transportation Committee.

My name is Dr. Barbara S. Bunk. I am a psychologist, co-chair of the Legislative Committee of the Connecticut Psychological Association (CPA), and the mother of a teenage driver. I am writing today regarding **HB 5748, An Act Concerning Teenage Drivers**. CPA applauds your efforts to improve the safety of the State, to create legislation that will protect our youngest drivers through a strong Graduated Driver's License (GDL). We support the spirit of this bill and offer comment for your consideration.

Research demonstrates that GDLs can and do effectively reduce the rate of crashes for teen drivers, especially the youngest and newest drivers. While we do know some of the important facets of the GDL, the optimal parameters are not yet obvious. There are a great variety of programs across the nation, though the most effective include a lengthy learning period (often with certification requirements), night driving restrictions, and passenger restrictions.

The adolescent mind is a unique entity. Only recently have we learned that the brain is 'under-construction' and does not reach its maturity until we are 20 – 25 years of age. In fact, the area of the brain that is last to mature happens to also be most influential in decision-making, judging right from wrong, differentiating good from bad, organizing and integrating sophisticated information. In addition, this same area (the pre-frontal cortex) also relates to one's ability to make social decisions, suppress impulses, and think of other people at the same time as myself. These of course are the cognitive skills most important for safe driving. This is not to say that the 16 year old can not learn to make good decisions about the complex task of driving, but rather to point out that such learning will not come easily to the adolescent. It could also point toward licensing adolescents older than 16 years.

The learning of a complex skill such as driving is multifaceted, and experience is the best teacher. Developing expertise takes time, practice, understanding of the goal, practice and more practice. It involves thinking, seeing, acting in a deliberate manner so that responses to situations become automatic. It also involves being able and willing to regulate one's emotional reactions during times of stress. An extended learning period is absolutely necessary for the young driver. While 40 – 50 hours is the norm in GDLs in the U.S., two jurisdictions require 80 hours and one requires 100 hours (according to the National Safety Council). In CT, why not err on the side of caution and require even more than 40 hours as written currently?

Finally, it is clear that adolescence is a time when peers are important, and the present rendition of **HB 5748** entirely restricts peers as passengers for 12 months. In some ways, this restriction might be inviting noncompliance. On the other hand, it is also true that parents and community are essential to the teen. The single most influential factor for the development of resilience (or adaptability in the face of stress) is a meaningful relationship to a person or community; therefore compliance would likely be enhanced if the legislation involved an adult in some integral way. For example, a requirement that a parent or parent surrogate be formally educated about the risk-factors as part of driver education; or requiring a contract between the teen and parent could be integrated into the bill. Overall compliance with each facet of the GDL would likely be enhanced via meaningful adult involvement.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about this very important issue. The teenage driver and his or her safety deserve our full attention. CPA thanks you for your efforts, and would be pleased to assist you in any way possible.

Barbara S. Bank, Ph.D.

Connecticut Psychological Association
Co-chair, Legislative Committee



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES

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*Testimony of the Department of Motor Vehicles
 Transportation Committee Public Hearing
 March 5, 2008*

Raised Bill No. 5748
AN ACT CONCERNING TEENAGE DRIVERS

The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) appreciates the Transportation Committee's interest and efforts to decrease the number of tragic accidents involving our newest drivers. Many of changes included in this bill were also proposed by the Governor in Bill No. 5043, which Commissioner Ward and members of the Teen Driving Task Force testified in support of.

Similar to Bill 5043, this bill before you increases the administrative license suspension for driving under the influence to one year for 16 and 17 year-olds; increases the behind-the-wheel instruction requirement (to forty hours); doubles the length of time that passenger restrictions apply to new 16 or 17 year-old drivers; changes the curfew from midnight to 11 p.m.; strengthens seat belt requirements; and imposes new license suspensions for young drivers who are convicted of certain graduated licensing violations and moving violations.

Two provisions of House Bill 5748 are "new", one of which could be quite problematic as it is currently written. **Section 10** appears to authorize police officers to immediately seize operators' licenses and impound motor vehicles when drivers of any age have been determined by the officer to have committed one of several specified offenses. The language, as it is written, is quite confusing in several respects, though, DMV believes the primary intent is likely to authorize a police officer to seize the license of a driver who is determined to be violating GDL restrictions.

DMV supports measures to temporarily revoke 16 and 17 year-olds' licenses for a twenty-four or forty-eight hour period. The language of this section should be rewritten to apply only to circumstances where such drivers are being cited by a law enforcement officer for violations of the GDL laws. DMV would further recommend that a parent or legal guardian be required to appear at the police station or troop to retrieve the teen's license credential.

As a whole, DMV supports measures aimed at better controlling the environment in which 16 and 17 year-olds are learning to drive responsibly and safely, and would be happy to work with this Committee to draft substitute language that will effectively accomplish the temporary license revocation outlined in Section 10.

Seat Belts Do Save Lives



MILFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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HARVEY B. POLANSKY, Ph.D.
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

March 5, 2008

Members of the Transportation Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room #2300
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Revision to Bill #5748

I come to you today from two very different perspectives. I am currently the Superintendent of Schools in Milford after previously serving in Southington and East Lyme. I am also the father of a sixteen year old.

Three weeks ago the Milford community faced horrific circumstances. Two of our own, two students at Jonathan Law High School, were killed in a deadly crash at the Milford Post Road Mall. We are still grieving over their loss and true words can not speak to the heavy hearts of the loss of our students, our sons and our friends. The circumstances surrounding this brutal fatality can be discussed. I am not here to discuss the merits or circumstances surrounding that particular crash. I am here to tell you that I have unfortunately experienced similar tragedies in Southington and East Lyme.

Yesterday I spoke with Dr. John Brady, Superintendent of Amity Regional Schools where two students were also killed in a tragic accident. He supports my testimony and wants you to know that they, too, are a bruised community.

Facts:

- #1 In 2006, 50 people died in crashes involving teenage drivers.
- #2 In 2006 the teen injury and crash rate was 39% higher than the rate for 35-49 year-olds.
- #3 In 2007 the number of teenage driver suspensions and licenses that were temporarily taken away was up to 975.

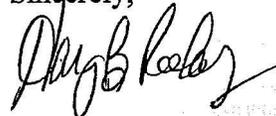
Each time, we lose the life of a young person who either did not have the skill, intuition, maturity or experience to avoid such tragedies. There is no substitute for experience and maturity. As the Superintendent of Milford Public Schools and as a father, I come to you today to help save our youngsters from further deadly accidents. I come to you today in a passionate appeal to change the law.

The revision of the law needs to include:

- ❖ **An increase in the driving age to 18 years old.**
- ❖ **The behind the wheel experience must increase. Permits should be issued for 1 year to increase driving experiences.**
- ❖ **Driving simulators should be included in all driving permit experiences. This will mandate that all young drivers who do not take a behind the wheel driver's education course are provided with real life driving simulations.**
- ❖ **Change the curriculum to mandate the drug and alcohol course be taught in our own health courses.**

My son takes his driver's test in a couple of weeks. I hope I have provided him the education and the experience to be a safe driver. Take that choice out of my hands and mandate better and safer driving.

Sincerely,



Harvey B. Polansky, Ph.D.
Superintendent

HBP/da

Attachment

SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 2008

Share this story; it may save a life

Dear Annie: Ten years ago, when my oldest grandson turned 16 and started driving, I cut out a column about a 17-year-old boy telling of his death in a car accident. I gave that column to our grandson, who taped it to the door of his closet where he read it every day to remind him he wasn't indestructible. Our grandson has since married, has a little boy of his own and is studying to be a policeman.

We live in West Michigan, and there have been several teenage deaths where speed was the culprit. I feel so bad for those parents and grandparents who will not see their children grow up. I would

appreciate it if you could print that column again. — Gram of Five, Greatgram of Five

Dear Gram: Here it is — one of the most requested columns we have printed: Dead at Seventeen by John Berrio.

Agony claws my mind. I am a statistic. When I first got here I felt very much alone. I was overwhelmed by grief, and I expected to find sympathy.

I found no sympathy. I saw only thousands of others whose bodies were as badly mangled as mine. I was given a number and placed in a category. The category was called "Traffic Fatalities."

The day I died was an ordinary school day. How I wish I had taken the bus! But I was too cool for the bus. I remember how I wheeled the car out of Mom's "Special favor." I pleaded, "All the kids drive." When the 2:50 p.m. bell rang, I threw my books in the locker — free until tomorrow morning! I ran to the parking lot, excited at the thought of driving a car and being my own boss.

It doesn't matter how the accident happened. I was goofing off — going too fast, taking crazy chances. But I was enjoying my freedom and having fun. The last thing I remember was passing an old lady who seemed

to be going awfully slow. I heard a crash and felt a terrific jolt. Glass and steel flew everywhere. My whole body seemed to be turning inside out. I heard myself scream.

Suddenly, I awakened. It was very quiet. A police officer was standing over me. I saw a doctor. My body was mangled. I was saturated with blood. Pieces of jagged glass were sticking out all over. Strange that I couldn't feel anything. Hey, don't pull that sheet over my head. I can't be dead. I'm only 17. I've got a date tonight. I'm supposed to have a wonderful life ahead of me. I haven't lived yet. I can't be dead.

Later, I was placed in a drawer. My folks came to identify me. Why did they have to see me like this? Why did I have to look at Mom's eyes when she faced the most terrible ordeal of her life? Dad suddenly looked very old. He told the man in charge, "Yes, he's our son."

The funeral was weird. I saw all my relatives and friends walk toward the casket. They looked at me with the saddest eyes I've ever seen. Some of my buddies were crying. A few of the girls touched my hand and sobbed as they walked by.

Please somebody — wake me up! Get me out of here. I can't bear to see Mom and Dad in such pain. My grandparents are so weak from grief, they can barely walk. My brother and sister are like zombies. They move like robots. In a daze. Everybody. No one can believe this. I can't believe it, either.

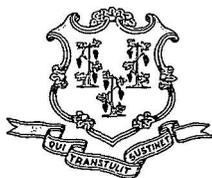
Please, don't bury me! I'm not dead! I have a lot of living to do! I want to laugh and run again. I want to sing and dance. Please don't put me in the ground! I promise if you give me just one more chance, God, I'll be the most careful driver in the whole world. All I want is one more chance. Please, God, I'm only 17.

Please e-mail your questions to anniesmailbox@comcast.net or write to: Annie's Mailbox, P.O. Box 118190, Chicago, Ill. 60611.



ANNIE'S
MAILBOX

KATHY MITCHELL
MARCY SUGAR



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE March 5, 2008

Richard Edmonds, Chief, Public Health Initiatives Branch, 509-7655

House Bill 5748 - An Act Concerning Teen Drivers.

The Department of Public Health supports House Bill 5748.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for Connecticut teens and are responsible for 39% of all deaths among 16 and 17 year olds.¹ Motor vehicle crashes are also a significant cause of inpatient hospitalizations and emergency department visits for teens. Between 2000-2004, over 1,500 Connecticut teens, 15 to 19 years of age were hospitalized due to motor crashes and approximately 29,000 were injured seriously enough to be treated in emergency departments.^{2,3} Teenage drivers have higher rates of involvement in fatal and injury producing crashes than older drivers. Connecticut teen drivers aged 16-17 years are more likely to be injured seriously enough in a crash to receive medical treatment than 18-19 year old drivers or 35-49 year old drivers. They are one and half times more likely to die in a crash than 18-19 year old drivers and more than twice as likely to die than 35-49 year old drivers.⁴

A number of factors contribute to the higher crash involvement of teenage drivers including lack of experience and driving skills and risk taking behavior. Crashes involving teen drivers have different characteristics than those of adult drivers. Teen crashes are more likely to involve night driving, multiple teen occupants, driver error, excess speed and other risky driving practices.^{5,6} Speeding is more likely to be a contributing factor in Connecticut crashes involving 16-17 year old drivers than it is for 18-19 or 35-49 year old drivers.⁴ Connecticut drivers aged 16-17 years are also more likely to be "at fault" drivers than either older teens or 35-49 year older drivers.⁴

Numerous studies have proven Graduated Driver License (GDL) systems as effective public health policy interventions to reduce crash risks for young drivers.⁷ GDL laws allow young drivers to gain experience and develop judgment and driving skills in supervised and low risk driving situations. A recent nationwide review of GDL laws found states with the strongest GDL systems have rates of 16 year old driver fatal and injury crash involvement that were 38% and 40% lower respectively than states without three stage GDL systems.⁸

The provisions of House Bill 5748, which include increased hours of on the road supervised driving practice, extended nighttime driving restriction, and increased length of time for teenage passenger restrictions will strengthen Connecticut's GDL laws and help to reduce the leading cause of death among teens in our state.

Thank you for your consideration of the Department's views on this bill.

References

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3. CT Hospital Association CHIME, Emergency Department Data 2000-2004 for teens 15-19 years.
4. CT Department of Public Health Crash Outcome Data Evaluation System (CODES) 2002-2004
5. Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Fatality Facts 2006: Teenagers
6. American Academy of Pediatrics. Policy Statement: The Teen Driver. 2006
7. NHTSA. Counter Measures That Work, 2nd Ed., 2007.
8. Baker SP Chen L, Li G. Nationwide Review of Graduated Driver Licensing. AA Foundation for Traffic Safety 2007.

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Affirmation / An Equal Opportunity Employer

Mike Bosco
Wolcott, CT

Hi my name is Mike Bosco. Im here to speak on behalf of the new driving law in which I am totally for. On October 4th 2007, my best friend Anthony Apruzzese was killed in a car accident on route 322 in Wolcott. He the driver, as well as his younger sister Jessica and best friend Tamara were also killed. I am 18 years old, and was 17 at the time. While all other kids my age were siked about college and planning there future, me and my friends were mourning. Anthony should of never had his license due to a past D.U.I. incident. Instead of losing his license for six months like the law required his was only suspended for 3 months due to a loophole in the present law. When I got my license, I was no where near the maturity level required to have one. Nor did I have the experience. It seems like everyday when I turn on the news its new teenager who has died from a car accident. Things are not the way they used to be. There is more kids now, more cars on the road, and worst of all the cars are a lot faster now. I read the proposed bill, and I agree with it. Sometimes its worth it to go the extra mile to make things safe. I don't want anyone to have to go through what I went through. Its something that you will never get over. That's why I think we need to change the present law. In the long run it will definitely be worth it. For your sake and for the sake of your children. When Anthony died, my father told me something I'll never forget. He said that some good has to come out of this. Or something positive has to be changed or done as a result of this. I think this Bill is that positive. Something that will ensure the safety of teenagers as well as any other driver on the road. So I'll leave you all on a quote from the Jewish Torah. It says that if we save one life... it is as if we have saved the world. For that one life that you save as a result to this law...may one day be someone that saves this world. Thank you all for letting me speak, and may you all live forever.

HB574B

Dana Drysdale

HB5748

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to be here today. On October 4th of 2007 I lost my sister, Thamara Correa, in a tragic automobile accident. My sister's school was canceled for the day and she was on her way to a friend's house. She was riding with her girlfriend in a car driven by the girl's brother. He was a 17 year old with a habit of speeding and dangerous driving. He displayed some of his stunts on his Internet site as well as on the streets of our town of Wolcott. He had previous tickets, accidents, and a reckless driving charge, but like so many other teenagers, thought he was invincible. We came face to face that day with just how fragile young lives can be. All three teens lost their lives in that accident with a great deal of fault landing squarely on the shoulders of that young driver.

For her own safety my sister was not supposed to be in his car, but on that day she chose to test the limits. She looked at it as just a quick ride to a friend's house. She was very respectful and not one to break rules, but I never thought that that one hasty decision would bring about me burying my 15-year-old baby sister.

She was a happy, energetic 15 year old with a smile that could melt your heart. She was loved by those around her and very trusting. She was held in very high regard by her classmates, teachers, and school administrators. But the ones that loved her the most were the babies. Her young nieces and nephews were truly privileged to have her in their lives. As many of us wake everyday with a broken heart after losing Thamara, these children are left with a great hole in their lives that was once filled with love and attention.

I feel that as adults we have a responsibility to protect our children and the impact our children have on our society. As a special education teacher and a mother I know that children make impulsive decisions on a daily basis that can have significant consequences. I believe that one of the roles of our legislators is to implement tougher guidelines on young drivers so they begin to clearly understand what can result as a consequence of their actions. I know that I will never get my sister back, nor fully understand why this had to happen to such a wonderful young woman. I also don't know how to explain to my 5-year-old son, nieces and nephews how a boy that had already broken so many rules was allowed to drive again.

I am not saying that a license should be taken away and never given back, but I believe driving is a privilege and needs to be treated that way. When a child is behind the wheel of a car, the potential for dangerous situations are very real. How ready are these children to handle and possibly be in charge of these situations? I believe we need to teach our children how to have responsibility with a car. I believe we need to look at other states such as NY and NJ, where they have stricter rules for first time drivers. Gradually giving a young driver privileges, will hopefully help them understand the responsibility they are taking on. When a 1 year old starts to walk, we do not just put them down and walk away. We stand with them, and walk with them to protect them and watch for dangerous situations so they learn to be safe and manage on their own.

I believe that if the boy driving the car my sister was in followed the stricter rules set by this bill, he would not have had a license on that day or any time soon. I know some parents have a hard

time saying no or setting limits, so it is up to the lawmakers to step in and foresee dangerous situations, isn't it?

I ask on behalf of myself, our family, our friends, my son, and nieces and nephews who will never see Thamara again do not make her death just another statistic, MAKE A CHANGE!!!

Ref: Bill# 5748 Young Drivers (Teenagers)

I want to thank our legislators for standing up and making changes in our current laws governing teenage drivers. These laws are necessary to ensure safe driving conditions for all motorists and pedestrians.

My wife Deborah and I, along with another passenger were victims of a car accident (Bristol-8/23/2007) caused by a careless, speeding teenage driver.

Deborah spent ten (10) weeks in the hospital, two (2) of them being in the critical care unit. She is undergoing physical therapy and coping with other medical issues, due to the accident. Her life has changed forever. Needless to say, mine has also.

Thanks to the support of prayers and loving care from family, friends, and complete strangers, we are continuing our daily battle of moving forward with our lives.

Our hearts and prayers go out to all the families that lost their loved ones in a needless accident. We do not want to see other people going through our nightmare.

Tom and Deborah Lehmann

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