

KATHARINE M. WATSON, MEMBER

ROOM B-16 MAIN CAPITOL
PO BOX 202144
HARRISBURG, PA 17120-2144
PHONE: (717) 787-5452

DISTRICT OFFICES:
1410 WEST STREET ROAD, SUITE B
WARMINSTER, PA 18974
PHONE: (215) 674-0500

13 WEST CREAMERY ROAD
P.O. BOX 166
HILLTOWN, PA 18927
PHONE: (215) 453-7888



House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

COMMITTEES

AGING & OLDER ADULT SERVICES
REPUBLICAN CHAIRMAN,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CARE & SERVICES
ETHICS
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
LIQUOR CONTROL
POLICY
CO-CHAIRMAN, HEALTHCARE REFORM
TRANSPORTATION
REPUBLICAN CHAIRMAN,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

CAUCUSES

ALZHEIMER'S
DIABETES
FIREFIGHTERS & EMERGENCY SERVICES
RENEWABLE ENERGY

APPOINTMENTS

INTERAGOVERNMENTAL COUNCIL
ON LONG-TERM CARE

Date: February 7, 2011

TO: Colleagues in the House

FROM: Representative Kathy Watson

SUBJECT: Brief History and Co-sponsor Request for upgrading the Graduated Driver Licensing Law for new, inexperienced drivers, age 16.5 to 18 years of age

In the near future, I will be re-introducing legislation to strengthen Pennsylvania's current Graduated Driver Licensing Law (GLD) governing the privilege and requirements the Commonwealth extends to teenage drivers, ages 16.5 to 18 years of age.

By way of background and some history for new members of the General Assembly: I have sponsored legislation to improve teen driving safety in each of the last three legislative sessions (**HB 2684** of the 2005-06 Session; **HB 163** of the 2007-08 Session; and **HB 289** of the 2009-10 Session). Each time my legislation was based on scientific fact and study conducted by such experts as Children's Hospital of Philadelphia; Allstate Foundation; State Farm Insurance; and Johns Hopkins University, to name just a few. The "upgrades" named in the bill were specific, and ones that have reduced crashes and fatalities for that age group in other states. There is a mountain of evidence from transportation experts confirming that distractions and inexperience in dealing with distractions, both inside the vehicle and on the road, have fatal consequences for these teens.

Why do I continue introducing and fighting for this legislation? Partly because I have a background in transportation/highway safety; and partly because, having read numerous studies done in other states that have these three additional GDL requirements, I know that crashes and deaths have decreased significantly for that age group.

Consider please the following statistics supplied by the Center for Inquiry Research and Prevention of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia:

Since I first introduced "teen driving" legislation in 2006, in PA:

- Approximately 130,000 teen driver crashes have occurred.
- More than 8,000 teens have been hospitalized with crash-related injuries.

- More than 500 teen drivers (ages 15-19); 300 of them passengers; and 300 other road users in PA died in teen driver-related crashes.
- Half of the teen drivers and their passengers who died were not wearing seat belts.

Certainly, parents are responsible for setting safety rules for their teens in their households. I respect that concept; I am a parent. The legislation I am proposing is designed to support parents and create a level playing field so all teens are subject to the same base level of rules, thus reducing peer pressure while improving driving skills. A recent Insurance Institute for Highway Safety survey showed that 89 percent of parents want limits on the number of non-family passengers allowed in vehicles driven by teens. According to State Farm Insurance, in the first full year following the implementation of the upgraded GDL law in Illinois, teen driving deaths were reduced by 40 percent.

Colleagues, a wise and respected senator friend reminded me, “Kathy, you can’t design a law that will bring every child home safe.” My response was, “I know I can’t but this teen driver legislation will bring more of them home safely and keep the rest of us safer, too. It has worked in other states.”

What exactly would the legislation do to “upgrade” the PA GDL law? It would:

- Increase the hours of behind-the-wheel training from 50 to 65 and require that 10 hours include nighttime driving and 5 hours be during inclement weather;
- Restrict the number of passengers in a car being operated by a junior driver to one person under the age of 18. Exceptions exist for family members;
- Make it a primary offense for any person driving a vehicle where a passenger under the age of 18 is not wearing a seat belt no matter where they are in the vehicle. The provision also makes the current booster seat law a primary offense to create consistency in the car, booster and seat belt law; and
- Eliminate a “double suspension” for certain teen driving speeding offenses currently creating a conflict in the law.

It is my belief that these reforms will further reduce teen deaths and crashes on our roadways. I would greatly appreciate your support for this legislation.

Respectfully, I invite you to join me in co-sponsoring this legislation. You may do so by contacting Meredith Schuler in my office at 787-5452 or mschuler@pahousegop.com.

KMW/ccm