



Jesse White

SECRETARY OF STATE

NEWS

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White Creates Task Force To Study Teen Driver Safety Issues

Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White today announced the membership of a Graduated Driver License (GDL) Task Force that will hold statewide hearings over the next 45 days to examine teen driving laws and propose legislation aimed at reducing teen traffic fatalities.

“Recent studies have shown that the most comprehensive GDL programs can reduce traffic fatalities for 16-year-old drivers by as much as 21 percent,” White said. “While Illinois’ GDL law already contains many of the components that are believed to reduce traffic fatalities for these young drivers, we want to make sure that we take every reasonable step possible to save more lives. These young people are our future leaders and we want to protect them so they have the opportunity to grow up and fulfill their aspirations.”

White said the GDL Task Force, comprised of legislators, traffic safety experts, law enforcement officials, educators and judges will hold public hearings in Springfield, Carbondale and Chicago. Members of the committee will examine Illinois’ GDL law, other state’s programs and recent studies that have concluded comprehensive GDL programs reduce teen traffic fatalities. The group will also study proposals from various traffic safety organizations to improve teen driving laws.

The mission of the task force is to develop legislation to strengthen the Illinois GDL law in a manner that enhances the safety of young, novice drivers and reduces fatal crashes involving teen drivers. White plans to introduce the legislation in the fall Veto Session.

The creation of the task force follows action this summer by White, State Rep. John D’Amico (D-15) and State Senator John Cullerton (D-6) to strengthen the Illinois GDL program by doubling the practice time young drivers will need to obtain an Illinois driver’s license. They successfully initiated the new law (Public Act 94-0897) requiring parents to spend 50 hours with their child in the car, including 10 hours of night driving, before the young person is eligible for an Illinois driver’s license. In addition, parents must sign a consent form before the teen may apply for a driver’s license.

“Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for people age 15 to 20,” White said. “About 1,000 16-year-old drivers are involved in fatal crashes in the United States each year. I believe this new law will help give our young people more experience behind the wheel, in a variety of situations, helping them to become better, safer drivers.”

GDL programs are designed to delay full driving privileges while allowing beginning drivers to obtain their initial experience under low-risk conditions. There are three stages: a supervised learner’s period, an intermediate license that limits unsupervised driving in high-risk situations and a full-privilege driver’s license available after completion of the first two stages.

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A recent study released by Johns Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health showed that GDL programs reduce by an average of 11 percent the incidence of fatal crashes among 16-year-old drivers. It also indicated that the most comprehensive programs reduce fatal crashes involving 16 year-olds up to 21 percent. Those programs included:

- An age requirement of 15 1/2 for obtaining a learner permit, 16 years for obtaining an intermediate license, and at least 17 years for full licensing;
- A wait of at least three months before allowing teens to apply for their intermediate-stage license;
- Nighttime driving restrictions;
- Either 30 hours of supervised driving or passenger restrictions.

Illinois already addresses each of the components of the most comprehensive GDL programs, but would need to tighten restrictions in certain areas even further to meet the most stringent criteria. Illinois also prohibits cell phone use for drivers less than 18 years of age. The state received a "good" rating from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety after passing the new law this year requiring 50 hours of supervised practice time behind the wheel.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA):

- In 2004, 3,620 drivers 15 to 20 years old were killed and an additional 303,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes nationally.
- Young drivers are twice as likely as adult drivers to be in a fatal crash.
- The factors contributing to these higher crash rates include lack of driving experience and inadequate driving skills; excessive driving during night-time, higher-risk hours; risk-taking behavior; poor driving judgment and decision-making; drinking and driving; and distractions from teenage passengers.

The members of the GDL Task Force are: State Senator John Cullerton; State Senator Cheryl Axley; State Senator Mattie Hunter; State Senator Sen. Tony Munoz; State Rep. Jay Hoffman; State Rep. John D'Amico; State Rep. Ron Wait; Judge Jeffrey R. Ford; Donna Smith, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; John Ulczycki, National Safety Council; Steve Blackistone, National Transportation Safety Board; Randall Dunn, State Board of Education; Michael Stout, Illinois Department of Transportation, Traffic Safety; Mark Gruca, Illinois High School & College Drivers Education Association; Becky Markwell, Illinois Traffic Safety Leaders; Susan McKinney, Mothers Against Drunk Driving; Dave Perozzi, Alliance Against Intoxicated Motorists; Brad Demuzio, Director, Illinois Secretary of State Police; Lt. Col. Craig Allen, Illinois State Police; Paula Davis, Superintendent of Pekin Schools; Matthew P. Jones, State's Attorney Appellate Prosecutors Office; Michael D. Karlin, Victim Advocate; Edward Maloney, Attorney at Law; Laimutis "Limey" Nargelenas, Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police; Greg Sullivan, Illinois Sheriffs' Association; William "Bill" Briggs, Illinois Federation of Teachers; and Jim Reed, Illinois Education Association.

A summary of the current Illinois GDL law and common questions and answers about the program can be found on Secretary of State Jesse White's website, www.cyberdriveillinois.com.

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